

JUDAISM

Homosexuality and the Order of Creation

Samuel H. Dresner

Heschel on Torah and on Tillich

Rebecca Schorsch

Aaron L. Mackler

Kafka's Letters to Felice

Lippman Bodoff

The Bridegroom of Blood: A New Reading

Pamela Tamarkin Reis

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

From Kafka to Felice

Franz Kafka is best known for his novels and short stories, which tend to portray the grimness and horror of contemporary life. They are universal in their concerns and reveal nothing personal about the author. However, if one turns to the letters which Kafka wrote to Felice Bauer in the years 1912-1917, a totally different picture emerges. The man, with his specific worries, doubts, joys and plans for the future, comes to life. His Jewish interests — especially his concerns about Zionism, Jewish beliefs and practices, the importance of a Jewish education and sincere observance of the *mizvot* at home, and the important difference between the assimilationist Judaism of West European Jewry compared to the proud ethnicity of East European Jews — create a totally different self from the one who might be extrapolated from his fiction. In “Letters to Felice — Kafka’s Quest for Jewish Identity,” *Lippman Bodoff* shows us how Kafka’s letters to Felice provide a record of Kafka the human being, living and breathing, and struggling to overcome the smug bourgeoisness of his own family, and comprehend an authentic Jewish spirituality.

The Function of Angels

Though God is one, the angels are multitudinous. Some of them are “messengers or the impersonal acts of Divine Providence.” Others are simply part of the heavenly court. Interestingly, they are less than perfect, can perform only one task at a time, and are definitely fallible. What is more, though the Psalmist maintains that God has made man but little lower than the angels, humans are seen as morally superior to them, and pious mortals are said “to rank higher in holiness than the ministering angels.”

In “How The Angels Do Serve,” *David E. Fass* points out these characteristics of angels, as well as many more, and then analyzes why there was a need for an angelology to have grown up at all. He suggests a number of reasons: that here was an “attempt to reconcile Babylonian mythology with Jewish legends,” or that, according to Ephraim Urbach, the Rabbis used “angels polemically to counter anthropomorphic materials.”

And, finally, that “the preference accorded to Israel (over the angels) is linked to the idea of election.” In place of angels read Romans/Babylonians or any other oppressors, all of whom have disappeared. God loves the Jewish people, and will preserve them because of his covenant with them, and asks of them only continued obedience to the commandments.

Two on Heschel

One of the outstanding theologians of the second half of the twentieth century was the late Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose influence was felt in both the Jewish and Christian religious worlds, as well as in the secular one. He was not a closet thinker, but a man whose conviction that thought should lead to action put him conspicuously in the forefront in Selma, Alabama, as well as in other places where it seemed vital to stand up for human rights and the social good.

In this issue we have two papers dealing with different aspects of Heschel's thought. One, “Symbols, Reality and God: Heschel's Rejection of a Tillichian Understanding of Religious Symbols,” by Aaron L. Mackler, discusses the difference between the views of the two theologians — the one Jewish and the other Protestant — on the dynamic relationship between God and man. The other, by Rebecca Schorsch, entitled “The Hermeneutics of Heschel in *Torah min Hashamayim*,” presents Heschel's views on the Oral Torah — the aggadah and the halakhah — as developed by the Rabbis, particularly Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva. (Note: this paper covers the first two volumes of *Torah min Hashamayim*; the third one came out just recently after the paper had gone to press. Perhaps, in some future issue, the last volume will also get its share of consideration.)

Homosexuality as Seen in the Bible

Though homosexuality has been a phenomenon throughout history and, in some societies, was a highly acceptable form of social behavior, it is in recent years that it became considerably more widespread and in the open. As a consequence, it has also become a matter for serious discussion from sociological, medical and religious points of view. In “Homosexuality and the Order of Creation,” Samuel H. Dresner maintains that it is a violation of that order. Citing the first chapter of Genesis and other texts in Tanakh, Rabbi Dresner points out how the Bible constantly speaks in terms of the male and the female as the desirable unit. He sees the flood as a punishment for the sexual deviance which was rampant at the time, and points to the matriarchs and the patriarchs as examples, for all time, of proper domestic relations.

A New Interpretation of a Strange Biblical Episode

Of the large number of Jewish rites, many of which are unobserved in these days, circumcision has an extraordinarily strong hold. Yet, all during the forty years in the desert, circumcision was not performed, lest the males be even temporarily weakened and their health threatened. We assume that Moses was not circumcised as a baby or he would not have been acceptable in Pharaoh's household. It would also, later in life, have indicated his origin to his wife, Zipporah, who was a Midianite. When she circumcised their son during Moses' return to Egypt, she calls Moses a "bridegroom of blood," a very strange epithet. The whole episode, as described in Exodus 4: 24-26, with its implication that God intended to kill Moses because he had not fulfilled the commandment of circumcision, has led to many scholarly interpretations as well as suggestions that these lines are out of place or that they are part of a larger narrative fragment, most of which has been lost.

In "The Bridegroom of Blood: A New Reading," *Paula Tamarkin Reis* offers still another interpretation, to the effect that these lines are not about the supremacy of the covenant of circumcision, but about something totally different — the struggle to establish Moses' full integrity as a Jew, to replace the conflicted self-image that he had developed as a child in Pharaoh's royal court.

Children in the Army of God

In 1980, the Lubavitcher Rebbe formed a children's army, "*Tsivos Hashem*," to study Torah and to perform *mizvot*. They are organized in military fashion, wear paramilitary uniforms and caps, and each has an ID card and a serial number. Both boys and girls serve in this army, and they rise through the ranks by accumulating points. These are given for studying extra Torah during the summer, for giving extra charity, for signing petitions to the President of the United States, or for reciting extra prayers or psalms during certain periods. The army has a newsletter and, of course, parental support, since failure to enroll one's children in this highly specialized army would imply a lack of support for the Rebbe.

Bonnie J. Morris shows us a hasidic world that is marching to the beat of a very special drummer. "The Children's Crusade: The *Tsivos Hashem* Youth Movement as an Aspect of Hasidic Identity," would seem to indicate that the identity can be established in unusual, quite modern, ways.

Watch Your Eyes

Eyes are not only instruments for sight; they can have the supernatural power to cause harm or to do good. Though that belief might be categorized as folk-superstition in our day, it was taken seriously and literally by the Rabbis who, in their discussions, cited many examples of the effi-

cacy of the Good and the Evil Eye. Obviously, the latter was to be avoided or its effects overcome by the recitation of special formulas, while the possession of the former was a valuable advantage. To Moses was attributed a Good Eye because he shared the Torah with the People of Israel, whereas Joseph and his descendants were particularly fortunate in that the Evil Eye had no power over them. “The Power of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye in Midrashic Literature,” by *Brigitte Kern-Ulmer*, is replete with rabbinic insights (pun intended) on an intriguing subject.

Addressing God in Yiddish

Through the ages, what united Jews all over the world was the fact, among others, that they prayed in Hebrew. Though that is no longer true in our days, it is interesting to note that even hundreds of years ago there was the recognition that not everybody knew Hebrew and, remarkably, that Jewish women needed special prayers to satisfy their particular needs. In the seventeenth century, Sarah Bas Tovim wrote such petitionary prayers (*tehinnot*) in Yiddish, and we offer here a translation of them by *Norman Tarnor*, who has also written an introduction to them. From “Three Gates Tehinno: A Seventeenth Century Yiddish Prayer” one might deduce a great deal about the life and concerns of Jewish women and their piety over three centuries ago. One might also recognize that some of their worries — about children, for spouses, and for sustenance — are still timely.

R.B.W.

Letters to Felice — Kafka's Quest for Jewish Identity

LIPPMAN BODOFF

I

Introduction

BECAUSE OF THE UNIVERSAL HISTORIC traumas of the past half century, scholars for many years treated Franz Kafka (1883-1924), like George Orwell and *1984*, as a prophet of political oppression, and the psychic abyss perceived to exist between God and the political institutions of society on the one hand, and individual man on the other. His characters were Everyman, and his messages universal.¹ More recently, however, history has taught a new lesson — that people still crave ethnicity and community, an identity that is drawn from the particular aspects of their culture and history, and not from the allegedly universal experiences of an abstract, depersonalized mankind or any of its putative classes. Not surprisingly, therefore, there has emerged a new awareness of Franz Kafka as a Jew, and not just as a precursor and symbol of the tragedy that engulfed the world after his death.

The absence, in any of his fiction, of any evident references to the Jewish experience, or to Kafka's own life as a Jew, contributed to the early, more abstract understanding of his work and its significance. However, one must also consider Kafka's non-fiction, the greater part of his output, in which he was far more explicit about matters relating to his Jewish iden-

1. " ... latter day intellectuals express a pronounced tendency to convert [Kafka, Gershom Scholem, and Walter Benjamin] into prophets of our postmodernist dilemmas." Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels — Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge and Cincinnati: Harvard University Press and HUC Press, 1991), p. 89; cf. p. 53. See also, Elias Canetti, *Kafka's Other Trial* (N.Y.: Schocken, 1974); *The World of Franz Kafka*, J.P. Stern, ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980); Alfred Kazin, "Kafka," in *The Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979), pp. 142-48; Albert Camus, "Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 124-38; Arthur A. Cohen, "Franz Kafka: Artist of the Incomplete," *Orim*, Vol. III, No. 2, Spring 1988. Earlier critics who emphasized the Jewish aspects of Kafka's work include Benjamin and Scholem, discussed in Alter's *Necessary Angels*, and Hannah Arendt, in "The Jew as Pariah, A Hidden Tradition," Part II in *Reconstructionist* (April 3, 1959): 8-14 (describing *The Castle* as a parable of the Jewish condition in exile).

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tity. This should not be surprising. In early 20th century Prague, Kafka and his family were part of a Jewish community that was surrounded by two warring anti-Semitic ethnic groups, the Czechs and the Germans, neither of which would accept Jews socially or culturally. The most comprehensive attempt to interpret Kafka's fiction from a Jewish standpoint is the challenging recent book by Ritchie Robertson,² but the best, surely most well rounded portrait of Kafka, which takes into some account the Jewish aspects of his inner life and surroundings — and, to some extent, of his literary output — is the biography by Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason*.³ Still more of such analysis remains to be done.

It is the thesis of this paper that Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer from 1912-1917, uniquely among his published works, documents the development by Kafka of a strong Jewish identity. I further argue that this developing identity was largely coincident with, and made possible by, Felice's decision to terminate their first engagement, in the summer of 1914.⁴ Close analysis of the letters suggests that, at the beginning of their relationship, Kafka did, indeed, view himself as scholars of his work and life have generally characterized him: alone and alienated in an environment of which he lacked understanding and over which he had no control; subject to the unknown laws and commands of unknown powers, that he had violated in unknown ways; guilt-ridden about his perceived physical and personal inadequacies; without roots or destiny; a secular cipher in a maze of an abstract political and social reality; without race or roots in space or time to provide him with an identity; without hope for meaning or salvation, in a life seen as totally arbitrary. Kafka viewed his art primarily as a refuge, a reason for living in a cave free from commands or commitments, rather than a calling to help humanity, a way to escape from a world from which otherwise there is no escape. However, after the first breakup of his relationship with Felice, he emerged fundamentally altered: he was willing to find fault and place blame on others and not just on himself; he was able — but for the problems posed by the World War (Pawel 332) — to produce productively as an artist; to develop emotional ties with women even if never to the point of marriage; and — most importantly — he generally ceased writing about himself in his non-fiction as powerless and infirm, without virtue or identity. Indeed, a con-

2. *Franz Kafka — Politics, Judaism and Literature* (Oxford, 1985). See, also, Arnold Band, "The Margins of Assimilation," *Modern Judaism* (May 1988): 135-55; Gershon Shaked, *The Shadows Within* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), pp. 3-21, 65-6; Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels*; Jean Jofen, "Kafka and the Rebbe of Gur," *Modern Jewish Studies*, VII (Yiddish, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1990): 85-91.

3. *The Nightmare of Reason* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 1985). Citations to Pawel are generally included, where necessary, for additional support from other Kafka writings, of factual points and conclusions that are drawn from the *Letters to Felice*.

4. Editor's Note to *Letters to Felice* (New York: Schocken, 1973) on p. xxv. Page citations in the text and the following footnotes are to the Schocken edition, unless otherwise stated.

trary development occurred: freed from having to make the symbolic commitment to the demands and expectations of family, religion and people symbolized by a middle class marriage to Felice Bauer, he developed a powerful Jewish consciousness — no less powerful because he could only articulate that vision and press its value on others rather than being able to live such a life himself.

Ironically, Kafka considered his failure to marry Felice as conclusive evidence of his failure to develop as a normal human being. I suggest that this accounts for the strange abyss between his non-fiction and his fiction. In the former, Kafka was able to document and reveal his personal development as a man and a Jew, as well as a writer of fictional parables about others, with a clear sense of identity, strongly held ideas and values, and a firm sense of belonging through his interest in, and relationships with, an extended family. This family included friends, colleagues, and the community of East European Jewish refugees with whom he came into contact as a result of World War I. But Kafka's personal development never came to be reflected in his fiction, in which he continued to express the lingering, painful memories of his early life and his guilt as a stunted failure, the perplexed, isolated, inadequate man that he confessed to Felice he was and would always be. What he thought he was, he expressed in his art. What he really was — or, more accurately, came to be — he expressed in his private papers, diaries, letters, and — most fully, I believe — in the *Letters to Felice*. In dramatically documenting the development of Kafka's personality and Jewish identity, the *Letters* — viewed in its entirety — represents what has been called Kafka's "longest novel, the only one he ever completed" (Pawel 280)⁵ and the one that most reveals his true self.

II

The Story of Kafka's *Letters to Felice*

To summarize the story: Kafka is born (1883) into a middle class family. His father is a business man, with a controlling personality (202, 310-11, 524-26; Pawel 7, 72); his mother is loyal to his father, and unavailable to Kafka (57, 94, 133, 210, 261; Pawel 14-15), who is also deprived of siblings for five years (113). They observe the Jewish rituals in a mechanical and partial way (502-3), and wish for Kafka to live a similar life, following the pattern of semi-assimilated Jews in the hostile *Galut* environment of Western Europe that conditioned conformance, crude selfishness, and a parvenu mentality rather than self-respect, and communal ethnicity and integrity (423; Pawel 31, 55-9, 151). The parents remain

5. Pawel never explains why the *Letters* is a "novel." For the interesting view of the *Letters* as fiction, a "theatrical performance . . . in which Kafka plays all the parts," see Pietro Citati, *Kafka* (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 44-5; cf., p. 41.

controlling, and Kafka remains dependent on them even as a young adult, reflecting their mutual desire that Kafka live with them or close to them and share his meals with them (57, 524-26; Pawel 169, 319), the weakness of Kafka's temperament, the strength of his father's, and the strong, though conflicted, emotional ties between parents and son (524-26; Pawel 54-60).

In 1912, to please his parents, Kafka ardently courts Felice Bauer, a middle class, educated, lively, religiously observant Jewish woman whom he has just met, who seems to meet his parents' requirements (5, 7, 11, 15-16, 160, 185-6, 270, 283, 310, 484; Pawel 266-7, 289, 303). To gain his independence from them, Kafka pursues the intellectual life of a writer (21, 27, 138, 357).⁶ He professes to be ascetic (31),⁷ a vegetarian, thin (152), unsocial (156, 276, 308, 460), unconcerned with clothes or dress (243), and conscious of being weak and in continuing bad health (20, 59, 66-7, 123-4, 174, 211, 260, 269-70, 295-6, 424), and he uses all of these as excuses to discourage Felice whenever she makes a positive response to his ardent letters of love. As if to confirm his independence, Kafka begins, via letters, to court Felice's best friend, Greta Bloch, who finds herself in the position of gradually responding to Kafka, while ostensibly carrying out Felice's request to ascertain whether Kafka loves Felice (323-4, 385, 394, 430; Pawel 304). In a "trial" of Kafka by Felice in 1914, after two years of Kafka's volatile courtship, Greta testifies against Kafka, as does Felice, and she breaks their engagement.⁸

The next three years, 1914-1917, involve an attempt by Kafka and Felice to find a compromise between his wish for solitude in the service of his art, and her wish for a bourgeois, urban Jewish life (440-1, 443, 453-63; Pawel 346-7). Their relationship follows a pattern of pursuit and rejection similar to that which led to Felice's termination of their engagement in 1914, but far more intermittently, and with little agitation and self-flagellation by Kafka.⁹ Indeed, there is even a second engagement, which is broken like the first, but with far less pain and trauma to Kafka.

6. See also Pawel, pp. 96, 99:

"Most of those who started to write in German," he wrote to Brod in June of 1921, "wanted to get away from their Jewishness, usually with their fathers' vague consent (the vagueness of it was what made it outrageous). They wanted to get away, but their hind legs still stuck to the fathers' Jewishness, while the forelegs found no firm ground. And the resulting despair served as their inspiration."

7. Pawel, p. 209, sees Kafka's vegetarianism as a subconscious, compulsive ritual "that replicated the talismanic function of Jewish dietary law and served needs and goals far different from those of which he was consciously aware."

8. See n. 16.

9. The entire three-year period, from October, 1914, when the first engagement terminated, to October, 1917, when the letters ceased, is covered in only the last 100 pages of the 550 page book. Clearly, while Kafka's "pursuit," as it were, of Felice formally continued during this period, it was intermittent and relatively half-hearted, as compared to the flood of beseechments and self-denigrations of the first 450 pages of his letters covering the first two years of their relationship (Canetti, *Kafka's Other Trial*, p. 78).

Of greater importance to him personally, is the satisfying week that he finally spends with Felice in Marienbad in 1916, in which their love is finally physically consummated. Here they experience mutual happiness for a fleeting moment in their relationship (473-7; Pawel 344-6).

The primary psychic focus of these three years (1914-1917), however, is not Kafka's quest for Felice but his quest for identity — specifically, his identity as a Jew — and to find a path of spiritual fulfillment.¹⁰ The choice begins as one between religion and spirituality, a new form of the original choice between marriage and writing. Soon the choice becomes one between West European Judaism and East European Judaism, between enlightened, rational, intellectual Judaism and mystical, ethnic, community- and people-oriented Judaism, between the Haskalah of Western European Jews and the Hasidism of Eastern European Jews (185-6, 475, 482, 500-3; Pawel 337-8).

Ultimately, Kafka integrates the self-respect and peoplehood of Zionism, Hasidism, and East European Judaism into a spiritualized religion and a sense of community and nationality, of racial pride, self-help, sharing, and commitment. These come together for him in real life through the Jewish People's Home, established in 1916, in Prague, for Jewish refugee children from Galicia. Helping these children, providing for their education and welfare, becomes Kafka's passion, and the true realization for him of Judaism, Zionism, and spirituality (482-513).

Yet, Kafka remains tied to his past because he has never fully freed himself from his ties to his parents. His father remains for him all-powerful and arbitrary — and so, for Kafka, God too, is still controlling, all-powerful, unjust and without meaning.¹¹ Thus, while Kafka's new freedom from Felice permits his spiritual development, his continued bondage to his father prevents him from translating his new insights into practice as part of his own life. Instead, he transmits these insights to Felice, with the same fervor as his earlier protestations of love, for her to adopt as her way of life. Through Felice and the Jewish Home, Kafka becomes a surrogate father to the children, and Felice's spiritual husband. The personal break between them in 1914 is finally resolved through the spiritual bond between them created by Felice's acceptance of Kafka's vision of Judaism, Zionism, and transcendent spirituality (500-13).

Kafka, the *Galut* intellectual, can only remain on the outside looking in. He now knows the correct path for others, but is unable to make it part of his own life. Like his hero, Moses, he can bring his fellow Jews to the Promised Land, but he is unable to enter (502-3, 543-5).¹²

10. Interestingly, Kafka's expressions of self-hatred virtually cease in this period.

11. *Letters*, pp. 524-26, and see also pp. 63, 310; n. 18; Pawel, pp. 207, 272; Alter, pp. 106-120.

12. We know from Ritchie Robertson's book that Moses, like Napoleon, was a hero and leader with whom Kafka identified (pp. 120, 134, 139, 221, 247). As to Napoleon, see

At the very end of his relationship with Felice, Kafka is afflicted with tuberculosis, and envisions this as the ultimate victory of what he perceives as his “evil” self — the German writer who wishes to live alone — over his “good” self — the Jew who wishes to marry, have children and live among, and as a part of, his own people (543-5).

III

The Letters from 1912 to 1914: Confessions of Inadequacy

Kafka's relationship with Felice is most insightfully reviewed in two parts: the first takes place from the summer of 1912 to the summer of 1914, concluding with the termination of his engagement to Felice in July of 1914. In that period, he alternately first pleads his case to Felice as an ardent, seriously intentioned suitor, and — when she indicates a favorable response — as ardently explains why she should not think of marrying him, because he is unworthy and will be unsatisfactory as a husband, lover, and father. This ambivalence is a metaphor of Kafka's early struggle with his identity as a Jew. Seeking to marry Felice is an attempt by Kafka to find a Jewish identity, and to effectuate a relationship with God and the Jewish people through the normal Jewish bourgeois life style of his time:

Yet in ways that he had only just begun to probe, his Jewishness, or lack thereof, was close to the core of his conflict over Felice. Unmarried, he was neither a man nor a Jew — a non-Jew, non-German, non-Czech, none but his own naked self adrift in a cold and hostile world. At the same time, he was quite definitely more of a non-Jew than anything else. If he could but find the gate that would admit him, he too could rejoin the ancestral tribe, become part of humanity, sustained by faith and a sense of belonging that would at last make it possible to live and to die. The handwriting on the prison wall spelled out the choice as well as the price: Marry Felice, surrender your self-hood, and the gate will be flung open, the tribe will embrace, engulf, and swallow you, silence your anguish and your voice, and blind faith will supplant the clear-eyed vision of guilt.¹³

Yet, in fleeing from the prospect of such a marriage and the responsibilities of identity associated with it, Kafka also continuously gave voice to criticisms of himself and of Jewish customs that rise to the level of self-hate, and a source of a deep urge to deny his Jewish identity. This self-denigration and self-denial mirrors the insults and defects of a despised

Robertson at, e.g., pp. 132-4, 216-17, and Pawel, p. 214. Kafka's interest in Napoleon is also documented in the *Letters*, pp. 134-172.

13. Pawel, p. 289, and see also pp. 303, 306, and *Letters*, pp. 272-80. Pawel has stressed that “Kafka's oft-cited note of January 8, 1914, ‘What do I have in common with the Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself,’ must be read” in the context of Kafka's running argument with the note's addressee, Max Brod, regarding Brod's “increasingly dogmatic Zionism” (p. 308).

and caricatured Jewish people, with which Kafka was personally familiar (Pawel 60, 203-6).

Thus, we find him obsessed with the physiognomy of Jews, with hooked nose and apoplectic complexion (86), and the “Jewish” (sic) relationship of eyes to nose (223), and “Christian looking” younger women and men (111, 243).¹⁴ He says to Felice, “You want a man, not a flabby worm” (211). He speaks of his general physical weakness and hypochondria, and his continuous exhaustion (123, 260, 269-70, 308, 425). He likes Felice’s sister’s eyes and nose structure because, although it is Jewish, “nevertheless (sic) she is strong and not easily crushed by misfortune” (223).¹⁵ He expresses jealousy of Felice’s German (non-Jewish) admirers who, in contrast to himself, are “healthy, well dressed and amusing” (243).

It is plain from the letters that Kafka’s fear of a sexual relationship with Felice was, in part at least, based on fear of impotence (37, 233, 270-2; Pawel 285-6); like his other physical obsessions, this, too, reflected the anti-Semitic picture of the Jew as sickly and anti-instinctual.

Like its sexual aspects, the trappings of marriage are also rejected, as a bourgeois life style. Thus, Kafka rejects a synagogue service, and the massive, heavy furniture that Felice has picked, as symbols of enslavement, “stifling,” (462-3) and a “tombstone” (462; Pawel 310, 312). In a tirade written just after Felice decided to break their engagement at her Berlin “trial” of Kafka in July 1914,¹⁶ he writes: “I asked you to cancel the ceremonies in the synagogue; you didn’t answer” (440). [I wanted] “an apartment higher up than the 4th floor, not in Prague, elsewhere,” in other words far from people, society, and Felice’s friends and the social obligations that they would impose. “I don’t need a permanent home from whose bourgeois orderliness I propose to run this business [of marriage] — not only do I not need this kind of love, it actually frightens me” (44). He recollects with pleasure a literary passage, in a book that he and Felice had once enjoyed, that speaks of furniture as “frivolity,” and suggests that the passage be “cut in stone” [like a commandment!] and “placed above the furniture store” (484). Here we have Kafka’s disgust with the Jewish middle class,¹⁷ which is to say, with himself and his family, which — con-

14. See, also, his remarks about shyness, and Jewish clothes and eating habits (Pawel at pp. 110, 163, 169).

15. Elsewhere he refers to himself as “the crooked *Western Jew*” (emphasis supplied) and “the crumbling Jew” (Pawel, pp. 180-1).

16. Felice’s decision to terminate her engagement to Kafka was made after a “trial” in which she was the plaintiff as well as the judge, with Kafka, of course, as defendant — a defendant who did little to defend himself from accusations that he had long made against himself. See Pawel, pp. 312-13 and *Letters*, pp. 436-41.

17. One cannot refrain from mentioning Kafka’s humorous reference to Felice’s “unerring eye for the average Jewish wedding present,” (p. 489) a comically hostile remark against her bourgeois values. He harbored similar hostility to rabbinic marriage (p. 392). Alter notes the connection between Kafka’s rebellion against his bourgeois origins and his father’s complacent, superficial, assimilationism (*Necessary Angels*, pp. 31-32, 119).

sidering his views on sex and asceticism — suggests that there is at war here, within Kafka, a Christian versus Jewish view of life in terms of the ideal, which Kafka was always seeking.

Kafka's ambivalence about marriage, of course, also reflects a desire to be German, to be like those who hate him but who lack his infirmities, or what he sees in himself, through German rejection, as infirmities. This is spelled out in a remarkable passage in which Kafka describes the pleasure which he takes in recalling an experience earlier in his life with a friend, the physically large and strong son of a Jewish bookstore owner. Kafka sees his friend dusting off the Jewish prayer shawls in the store window, while near him are "obscene" (Jewish) books, and Kafka then follows his friend to the exclusive German club to which he — but not Kafka — belongs, recalling that his Jewish friend considered himself a German (203-4).

The Germans, in Kafka's recollection, accept not the intelligent, sensitive Jew (Kafka) but his friend, the gross, yet strong and healthy Jew, who, in a display of independence from his Jewish father, leaves behind the useless, unwanted, dusty prayer shawls and the "obscene" books to join his German friends in revelry, while Kafka stands outside admiring his friend's good luck, and wishing that he could be like him, accepted by the club.

Kafka's second relationship with Felice takes place between the summer of 1914 and October 1917. Relieved of an obligation to make good on his inner need to marry the symbolically bourgeois, Jewish Felice, Kafka is able overtly to pursue a more gradual and freely achieved quest for a Jewish identity¹⁸ — through an evolving articulation of the religious, cultural, and national aspects of Judaism as he came to understand it. Thus, while it is true, as Arnold Band has noted, that Judaism, marriage and writing were Kafka's avenues of escape from the "unberable emotional maze of his life," the truth is more complicated, as Kafka's *Letters to Felice* show. It appears that marriage was but the first of these avenues which

18. The need to marry and displace his father and, thereby, become a middle class Western Jew like his father (Pawel, pp. 239, 363-64, 369), was constantly frustrated by Kafka's guilt, impotence, and desire for solitude and independence, caused by "a mother lost to him, along with two rivals [his deceased younger brothers] killed by his own lethal fantasies" [wishing or imagining their death], and his "obsessive struggle against an omnipotent father" (Pawel, pp. 16-17, 63). See, also, Band, pp. 148-55. Pawel notes that, in 1911, Kafka was "beginning to confront the whole problem of Jewish identity or, more precisely, of his own identity in a non-Jewish and anti-Jewish world" (p. 228). Thus, Kafka's relationship with Felice, which began in 1912, can be seen as an inevitable and crucial stage in this process, in which she first becomes a metaphor for his quest and then, after his release from the impossible burden of a commitment to marriage, becomes the means, the channel through which Kafka is finally able to develop that identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that, by the end of his life, Kafka was dreaming about going to Palestine, and studying Torah and Talmud with the last love of his life, Dora Diamant (Pawel, p. 436). Alter views Palestine and marriage as "unrealizable consummations" for Kafka (*Necessary Angels*, p. 42).

he fully pursued, evidently because marriage would have provided the more symbolically meaningful achievement of relief from the psychic pressures that plagued him.¹⁹ But Felice's termination of their engagement discharged Kafka, as it were, from any further responsibility to achieve an identity and Jewish connection through a bourgeois Jewish marriage, as the paucity of his letters to her thereafter indicates. As a result, Kafka became able to pursue his quest for self-respect and sense of belonging through his writing and an understanding, at least, of his Jewish identity. One may even plausibly conjecture that had Kafka lived longer than his forty-one years, the sense of worth and confidence that he gained from his literary achievements, and his increasingly strong Jewish identity, might finally have permitted him ultimately to marry successfully and to live, as well as to write about, Judaism — as we know from the plans that he began to make to go to Palestine in the last few years of his life.

IV

The Letters from 1914 to 1917: Quest for Identity

Kafka's successful quest for identity as a Jew is played out in the psychic and spiritual drama depicted in his letters to Felice after that traumatic summer of 1914. Shortly after the end of their engagement, he portrays two selves that have been locked in combat within himself. The one, with perhaps only modest improvement or cultivation, might still assume the challenges and responsibilities of marriage, fatherhood, children, an apartment, rules and routine, and all that marriage and its commitments stand for. The other self is desperate for freedom and independence, creativity, and solitude, capable of suffering for a life devoted to writing — and of "meanness" (438-40). Here is the first departure from Kafka's past rhetoric with Felice — an admission that to be the solitary writer involves a moral defect. And, in that same letter, after carefully explaining why he and Felice were each justifiably afraid of the other, there is another departure — the suggestion of the possibility, which neither had proposed before, of a compromise, a middle way between the extreme life style of solitariness and freedom sought by Kafka the writer, and Felice's desire that he accept society and responsibility. Although he is unable to suggest a concrete plan of compromise (440-1; Pawel 346-7), this idea presages a new development in his philosophic outlook — the view that the good life requires some degree of commitment and action, and not just the solitary theorizing, or even creativity, of the artist.

19. Arnold Band, p. 150; *Letters*, pp. 272-80; Pawel, p. 270 (Kafka's first letter to Felice was "a first blow in the struggle for his liberation"); p. 275 (Kafka envisaged marriage as a "more or less normal existence which would somehow resolve his conflicts, assure his independence, and enable him to function effectively both as a husband and a writer. The illusion did not outlive the Spring."); and p. 288 ("His creative vein, however, began to give out."); see also, n. 13.

We also see Kafka beginning a process of repentance, of recognizing that a wrong has been done to Felice, admitting it, and — partially at least — suggesting the possibility that the wrong will not be repeated. Whatever merit there is to the high regard enjoyed by Kafka as a speaker for alienated man and a prophet of political developments long after his death, it seems that his novel, *The Trial*, written contemporaneously with most of the *Letters to Felice*, was, from the standpoint of Kafka's subconscious, an exorcism, a playing out of his recognition of the need for a real trial, on account of his arrogance and vanity in his relations with Felice, his invasion and conquest of her very psyche with no real intent ever to make good on his protestations of love in the way which he knew that Felice would want and expect.²⁰

Most importantly, however, the final 100 pages of the *Letters*, that comprise Kafka's second relationship with Felice, focus on four Jewish themes: Zionism, Judaism and religion generally, East European, as compared to West European, Judaism, and — the point of synthesis for all of these commitment alternatives — the Jewish People's Home.

Kafka's relationship to Zionism at first seems neither clear nor constant (15-16, 84, 207-8, 239, 421, 423, 482, 501), but I believe that there is a pattern to his understanding of, and sympathy for, the movement, which changed over time in parallel with the advent of a new spirituality

20. Indeed, on p. 275, he clearly recognizes that he has "tormented" her. See, also, Shaked, p. 66. Canetti, p. 81, makes little of Kafka's guilt. But, clearly, there is much more to *The Trial* than Kafka's sense of guilt from his treatment of Felice. Kafka, like Gershom Scholem and certain other West European German Jews, although uprooted by their upbringing from Jewish religion, nevertheless sought Jewish roots and identity. As a result of having to come to terms with rejection by the gentile world because of their Jewishness, these Jewish intellectuals were attracted to the proud and unselfconscious ethnicity, piety, and sense of community, including both its mysticism and Zionism, of East European Jewry. Arthur Hertzberg and Gershon Shaked thus understand Kafka's *The Trial* as asking two basic questions: "Why is this 'European' being persecuted even by the most enlightened of his society, a society he accepts and wishes to remain a part of?" and, "Of what is he guilty?" Both reach the conclusion that the Jews of Europe were fated to impersonal and baseless persecution; no matter how long and hard they tried to ascertain, confess and correct their real and imagined flaws, they could never attain social acceptance, because the European hatred of the Jew was too irrational and too deep (Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* [Jewish Publication Society, 1968], p. 336; Shaked, pp. 1-11, 65-6; cf. p. 31). Alter sees Kafka as caught in the no-man's-land between a discredited religious tradition and the inconvenience and worthlessness of modern secular culture (*Necessary Angels*, pp. 100-120).

It is worthwhile to contrast Kafka with Jewish writers like Stefan Zweig and Berthold Auerbach, who were comfortable and confident in their liberal, assimilated state, and others like Arnold Zweig, Joseph Roth and Jakob Wasserman, who internalized anti-Semitic hatred and tended to justify the victimization of the Jew in European societies (Shaked, pp. 23-7, 46-7, 62-8; Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Observations on Berthold Auerbach's Jewish Novels," *Orim*, Spring 1986, Vol. I, No. 2). Nevertheless, even in the works of Roth and Wasserman one find glimpses of a recognition that, ultimately, the rejected Jew can, and must, find salvation in the authentic expressions of Judaism of East European Jewry (Shaked, pp. 34, 67).

in his outlook brought about as a result of the First World War. Early in his correspondence with Felice, there is distinct ambivalence to Zionism. When he first meets her, he is impressed with her interest in the study of Hebrew, and they even discuss a trip to Palestine at their very first meeting!²¹ Yet, early on, he writes to her about a young man he met who is

sensible, keen, active, amicable, but who has a degree of composure I find altogether disturbing . . . At that moment my indifference to him as a person or to any form of Zionism was immense and inexpressible . . . (207-8).

But, just a few months later, in April 1913, his advice to his East European friend, Löwy, who is having trouble making ends meet from his Yiddish Theater group, is: "Go to Palestine" (239). Here we have another clue as to how Kafka is going to resolve the terrible war within himself between commitment and contemplation, joining the Jewish people or living in spiritual, artistic isolation: he will urge it on others as the right path, but remain Hamlet-like as far as his own life goes. For now, his ambivalence continues. Thus, in a strange letter written in September of 1913, he writes about his feelings toward Zionism at a Zionist Congress: [I feel] "for the entire concept", but not "for the essential part" (317).

By August, 1916, he chides Felice about her attitude to

. . . Zionism, with which you are not sufficiently familiar. Through the Jewish Home other forces, much nearer to my heart, are set in motion and take effect. Zionism, accessible to most Jews of today, at least in its outer fringes, is but an entrance to something far more important. What's the good of writing? You are silent (482).

Zionism has now become not an end, which evidently Kafka could never appreciate, but a means to a larger, transcendent goal, in which he could believe.

That same dichotomy permeated his view of Judaism and religion, a dichotomy between the institutional and the spiritual:

How devout are you? You go to the synagogue; but I dare say you have not been recently. And what is it that sustains you, the idea of Judaism or of God? Are you aware, and this is the most important thing, of a continuous relationship between yourself and a reassuringly distant, if possibly infinite height or depth? He who feels this continuously has no need to roam about like a lost dog, mutely gazing around with imploring eyes; he never need yearn to slip into a grave as if it were a warm sleeping bag and life a cold winter night; and when climbing the stairs to his office he never need imagine that he is careening down the well of the staircase, flickering in the uncertain light, twisting from the speed of his fall, shaking his head with impatience (185-6).

Yet, we must note that Kafka, unlike Heine, whom he disliked on many counts, both personal and aesthetic, never thought of conversion or any overt identification with Christianity. For Kafka, "Christianity is

21. *Letters*, pp. 5, 15-17, 85. Ten years earlier, in 1902, he had written mockingly of his friend Bergmann's Zionism (Pawel, p. 67).

an alien faith" (126).²² Judaism, as a faith and as a religion, was obedience to the Commandments, and Kafka is upset that Jews have neglected their faith (151).

... (keeping the Commandments is not an outward thing; on the contrary, it is the very essence of the Jewish faith) (502-3).

Elsewhere, Kafka draws a picture of his ambivalence to Judaism as an ill-fitting garment, unwanted and rarely used, together with a strong statement of his respect for Judaism, and despair at its lack of observance by others:

At the very moment you read this letter I may be driving to the synagogue — wearing my old tailcoat, cracked patent-leather shoes, a top hat far too small for me, and with an unusually pale face (because nowadays I always take so long to get to sleep) in my position as an usher sitting next to a pleasant, pretty, elegant, and above all very considerate and modest cousin — where the marriage will be solemnized with that tremendous solemnity that upsets me every time. Because the Jewish public in general, here at any rate, have (sic) limited the religious ceremonies to weddings and funerals, these two occasions have drawn grimly close to each other, and one can virtually see the reproachful glances of a withering faith (151).

The idea of spirituality as commitment to community begins, ironically, with Kafka comparing Judaism, to some disadvantage, with the "ancient, heart stirring, expectant Germany of the last century," and the community and comradeship of German writers, editors and readers (158-9). Moreover, this admiration for Germans is coupled with self-hatred of his latent Jewish personality, that is, his internalized view of the German view of Jews. Thus, at that same time, he expresses self-consciousness for behaving in an "exaggerated, conspicuous [Jewish] way at a Buber lecture" (on Hasidism or Zionism) (161). Yet, within a few years, his emerging idea of true spirituality — living together in a community of sharing and commitment — was to be transferred from Kafka's "writer" self and its limited community of editors and readers, to Kafka's "husband" or Jewish self, with the entire people of Israel as the community (412, 500).

Kafka's next step in his quest for spiritual identity is recognizing that one cannot prove God first and only then begin to embrace a formal religion. One "can prove the existence of God by one's own concept," but it "can be disproved by the absence of any such concept" (258). Thus, without faith, we make God up, and such a religion is inevitably weak. Ultimately, Kafka was unable to embrace either a Judaism of pure faith or a Judaism of practice and ritual (502-3), but here he was groping for the important idea, whether for him or for others, that deeds and rituals as

22. Discussing the German word for mother — *Mutter* — Kafka said:

"*Mutter* to a Jew sounds particularly German; it unconsciously contains Christian chill along with Christian splendor. The Jewish woman referred to as *Mutter* therefore becomes not only comical but a stranger as well. I believe that only the memories of the ghetto are what still preserves the Jewish family . . ." (quoted in Pawel, p. 249).

part of a religious community must come first, before faith, and that only through them is a sustainable faith possible.

The concept of Judaism as a faith community was now beginning to be more attractive to Kafka conceptually, although accompanied by continuing regret that it was not for him. Thus, barely a year after asking Felice what Judaism means to her, religion or God, deed or creed, he writes in June 1914:

Owing to circumstances and temperament [I am] excluded from every great soul-sustaining community on account of my non-Zionist (I admire Zionism and am nauseated by it), non-practicing Judaism (423).

Here we find, for the first time, the articulation of the idea of Judaism as a faith community, such as he had undoubtedly been hearing about from Martin Buber in the lectures that Kafka had attended (157-8, 161, 163-4). By "soul sustaining community," he is embracing the idea of people, structure, commitment, rules, the package which he had rejected when the issue for him was marriage. Yet, he regretfully acknowledges that such a life is not for him.²³ He was let down by the spiritual and religious inadequacy and hypocrisy of his father, and, without that legacy of childhood training in Judaism in an environment of love and integrity, it is too late now for him.

There was a fleeting moment later, in 1914, when a new opportunity for commitment to form a community opened up for Kafka: to be a soldier and fight for the Kaiser and for the Germany that part of him loved. Ironically, that odd opportunity failed to materialize because of his health,²⁴ the same problem which he earlier used with Felice to escape the commitment of marriage.

Two years later, as we recall, in the summer of 1916, Kafka and Felice spent a glorious week in Marienbad. All of his fears about sexual impotence disappeared. He remained there after she went back to Berlin, and here begins Kafka's final ascent to his vision of what it means to be a Jew. For, by now, the issue is no longer merely deed or creed. It is, even more, a battle between Judaism West European style, and Judaism East European style. Is real Judaism the rational, austere, cold, dignified, intellectual Judaism of Germany, always so alien to him, or the warm, social, exuberant, and mystical Judaism of Galicia?

The letters enlighten us greatly, and trace the story. The week after Felice left him, Kafka writes enthusiastically about the Belzer Rebbe, then vacationing at Marienbad too:

... we were not even aware of the most distinguished visitor to Marienbad, a man in whom so many place their trust: the Rabbi from Belz, no doubt

23. Pawel, pp. 53-60, 98-100; see also, *Letters*, p. 502: "... owing to my origin, my education, disposition, and environment I have nothing tangible in common with their faith ..." (emphasis added).

24. *Letters*, pp. 449, 454, 458; Pawel, p. 326. Yet, he deprecated patriotic parades as "disgusting" (Pawel, p. 320).

at present the chief representative of Hasidism. He has been here for 3 weeks. Last night for the first time I joined him and some 10 of his entourage on their evening walk. A great deal could be said about it, but I have just written about it at length to Max [Brod] who had informed me of the Rabbi's presence here (475).

One can trace a direct path from the Belzer Rebbe to East European Judaism, which, as we shall see, Kafka chose as the model for Felice in connection with her work at the Jewish People's Home.

It seems no accident, after this time with Felice and an inspiring evening walk with the Rebbe, that the next day Kafka reports on the gargantuan meals (with meat!) which he is eating, and that he is getting "fat" (475-7)! Suddenly, finally, a note of happiness, contentment, and spiritual ease creeps into the hitherto spare, severe, and demanding prose of Kafka's letters.

But there is one more step left. We have a life style, a leader with charisma, and we have Kafka now referring to life with Felice as a "blessed way of life" (477), thus almost closing the circle between his phobia of marriage and his achieving a Jewish *persona*. What is still missing is a concrete opportunity for Felice to live the kind of Jewish life that Kafka has chosen as correct — thereby permitting Kafka, as we shall see, to live a life as a Jew vicariously, through her.

The East European way was not suddenly chosen by Kafka that night when he walked with the Rebbe, or as part of the afterglow of his (finally) consummated relationship with Felice. It goes back, and one senses that it goes back, to Kafka's own experience with, and reaction to, the players and the plays of the Yiddish theatre, which he described to Felice early in their relationship.²⁵ But this was, nevertheless, only theater, and not life. The opportunity to live a Jewish life in a real community was presented in 1916, with the establishment of the Jewish People's Home for the education of the children of Jewish refugees from Galicia.²⁶ And, for the last 75 pages of the *Letters*, Kafka proceeds to encourage, cajole, and press Felice at every opportunity to play an active role in the Home (482-513). It is more important than her job, her family, the theater, or even literature, and its essence — now the essence of Judaism for Kafka — is its all-embracing humanity:

The main thing is the human element, only the human element . . . your office, your family, literature, the theater, were able by their very nature

25. *Letters*, pp. 25-6, 128, 179, 239, 249, 264, 267; see also Pawel, p. 239-42; Robertson, pp. 14-37; Alter, p. 38. Pawel's statement, p. 240, that Kafka was later to shed his romanticized 1911 view of the East European Yiddish Theater as representing traditional Judaism and community is contradicted by Kafka's later endorsement of East European Jewry as precisely the kind of faith community which is most authentically and worthily Jewish, as Pawel notes at pp. 335-6.

26. *Letters*, p. 477; Pawel, pp. 335-6: "To Kafka . . . the Galician refugees were the living embodiment of Jewishness . . . T[hese] masses possessed precisely what Western Jewry had long since lost — deep roots, a sense of belonging, and communal strength . . . "

to claim only part of what is best in you; . . . here, [with the Home] however, lies the actual connecting link which in its turn will let everything else, including your family, etc., benefit by what is best in you. (498).

Its importance lies less in the benefits which it confers on the children than on the spiritual benefits, the spiritual life, which it will provide to Felice:

As far as I can see, it is positively the only path, or threshold to it, that can lead to spiritual liberation. The helpers, moreover, will attain that goal earlier than those who are being helped. Beware of the arrogance of believing the opposite, this is most important (500).

The Home is the only important reality:

Only the reality of the Home can teach you anything of importance — any reality, however small. Don't be prejudiced in favor or against, nor let the thought of me affect your open mind. You will see those in need of help, and opportunities of giving help judiciously, and in yourself the power to help — so help. It is very simple, yet more profound than any fundamental idea. Everything else you ask about will, if you go through with it, follow quite naturally from this one simple fact (500).

One can try to make the children into the Berlin version of West European Jews — “contemporary, educated” — but, “with that not much would be achieved” (500). The ideal, rather, is East European Jewry, their values and way of life:

If, for instance, I had to choose between the Berlin Home and another where the pupils were the Berlin helpers (dearest, even with you among them, and with me, no doubt, at the head), and the helpers simple East European Jews from Kolomyja or Stanislawow, I would give unconditional preference to the latter Home — with a great sigh of relief and without a moment's hesitation. But I don't think this choice exists; no one has it; the quality corresponding to the value of the East European Jew is something that cannot be imparted in a Home; on this point even family education has recently been increasingly unsuccessful; these are things that cannot be imparted, but perhaps, and here lies the hope, they can be acquired, earned. And the helpers in the Home have, I imagine, a chance to acquire them (500).²⁷

Ultimately, the Home becomes the source of Kafka's belief in Zionism. The connection of the Home with “Zionism (valid for me . . .)” is that Zionism “gives the Home a youthful, vigorous method, youthful vigor generally, and that, where other means might fail, it kindles national aspirations by invoking the ancient prodigious past” (501). Some day, he adds ambiguously, “you may realize that I am not a Zionist” (501), presumably because Kafka stresses its spiritual dimension, the opportunity it provides for people to live in a real community, helping each other as Felice is helping the Galician refugee children.

There is even a place for Judaism in such a community, a Judaism

27. The books that Kafka recommends include Sholem Asch's *Stories from the Bible*, Peretz's *Popular Tales*, and works of Sholem Aleichem (pp. 509-12), although Kafka thought that the latter might be “too sarcastic and complex” (pp. 510-11).

that Felice can teach the children because she was once a practicing Jew, which Kafka cannot be, as much as he would like to be:

On the whole it will be up to you to get them to trust you in other than religious matters and, where the sharing of religious experience is needed, to let the dark complexity of Judaism, which contains so many impenetrable features, do its work. Nothing of course should be blurred in this way, as people are inclined to do here. In my opinion this would be entirely wrong. I wouldn't think of going to the synagogue. The synagogue is not a place one can sneak up to. One can do this today no more than one could as a child; I still remember how as a boy I almost suffocated from the terrible boredom and pointlessness of the hours in the synagogue; these were the rehearsals staged by hell for my later office life. Those who throng to the synagogue simply because they are Zionists seem to me like people trying to force their way into the synagogue under cover of the Ark of the Covenant, rather than entering calmly through the main door. But as far as I can see, it is quite different for you than it is for me. While I should have to tell the children (it is unwise, of course, to encourage such conversations, and on their own they would arise but rarely, for town-bred children have sufficient experience of the world and, if they are East European Jews, know how to protect themselves and at the same time to accept the other person) that owing to my origin, my education, disposition, and environment I have nothing tangible in common with their faith (keeping the Commandments is not an outward thing; on the contrary, it is the very essence of the Jewish faith) — thus, while I would somehow have to admit it to them (and I would do so candidly, for without candor everything would be quite pointless in this case), you on the other hand may not be altogether lacking in tangible connections with the faith (502-3).

And so, at the very end of the story of the *Letters*, Kafka leaves to Felice his Jewish legacy. But it is for her to carry on, not for him, because of the permanent, debilitating flaw of his childhood. Here, in the Home, God, his father, Felice, Zionism, Jewry, and Kafka meet. It is the home and community that he always longed to be part of, to provide identity and meaning to his life. One may venture to suggest that he would probably have preferred to be an orphan in such a refugee shelter of East European Jews, rather than a biological child in an emotionally and religiously empty home, neglected by his mother and tyrannized by his father — as he had been as a child.

The Home also provides a remarkable fulfillment of Kafka's longings for marriage and fatherhood, both of which were frustrated by the permanent war between his two selves. Indeed, it finally fulfills the longing of his Jewish self for the marriage to Felice that could never occur. For Kafka's strong, continuing interest in every aspect of the education and welfare of the Jewish refugee children in the Home amounts to nothing less than his adoption of them as his own children and, in guiding Felice's care of them, Felice becomes their mother and ultimately, in Kafka's eyes, his spiritual wife:

It is almost as though the girls were my children and had acquired a mother ... (506).²⁸

For him, the Home has provided a surrogate relationship with Felice no less strong than marriage.

I can think of no closer spiritual bond between us than that created by this work (500).

Here, Kafka describes the spiritual bond between them created by the Home as superior to the normal love of a man for a woman, whereas — before the crucial breakup of their first engagement — the normal bond of love was expressed in almost identical fashion to be superior to the spiritual bond, created by “rabbinical blessing.”²⁹ Thus, Kafka’s spiritual union with Felice through the Home is now the surrogate for normal sanctified marital union, as well as for his parental home in which he was so unhappy.

In the end, the spiritual war within Kafka is finally resolved at both levels on which it was fought: the level involving his inability to marry Felice, have children and a family, and the level involving his quest for identity — the battle between Kafka the German writer and Kafka the East European Jew. In both cases, the war was both won and lost. It was won in the sense that, as a result of his disengaging from the tormenting ambivalence of his personal, legal, social, and physical relationship with Felice, he was able to conceptualize and even experience spirituality, commitment, Zionism, and Jewish identity — via a surrogate Home which embraced them all. It was lost because, as a result of his continuing unresolved love-hate relationship with his father, and to a lesser extent with his mother, and the hypocrisy of the family’s religious life, he was never able to translate his new vision of Judaism, Zionism, and spirituality into a permanent part of his own life, through a wife, children, and a family and community life (502-3, 524-5, 543-6).

But there is an epilogue to this drama, one of sadness and irony. For, in the last pages of the *Letters*, Kafka writes about blood gushing from his lungs, and the doctors’ diagnosis of tuberculosis, and concludes that it can never be cured, because it is not a physical wound amenable to medical cure.³⁰ Rather, it is, in Kafka’s diagnosis, a spiritual wound from a mortal

28. See also, *Letters*, pp. 507-10, 519-22, 531-32, 536, 538.

29. *Letters*, p. 500; compare with p. 392. It remains to be noted that, in finally defining his Jewish identity in terms that embraced East European Judaism, Kafka achieved another form of triumph over the crippling effects of a dominating father — because his father looked down on East European Jews, as did most of Prague’s Jews (Pawel, pp. 245-46). For the view that Kafka’s identification with East European Jewry was a form of rebellion against his Westernized parents, see Michael A. Meyer, *Jewish Identity in the Modern World* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), pp. 30-2.

30. There is now substantial medical support for the view that the human body can succumb to a major, intense, emotional, or psychological conflict because of its impact on the immune system (J.R. Calabrese, M.A. Kling, and P.W. Gold, “Alterations in

blow struck by his solitary German writer self, whom Kafka calls his “evil” side, against his “good” side, the side of his self that still longs for marriage and family, the self that finally chose, at least for others, community, nationhood and commandments, and the self-respect of East European Jewry (543-6). Kafka’s internal conflict has been nothing less than a war:

As you know, there are two combatants at war within me. During the past few days I have had fewer doubts than ever that the better of the two belongs to you. By word and silence, and a combination of both, you have been kept informed about the progress of the war for 5 years, and most of that time it has caused you suffering.

... Of the two who are at war within me, or rather whose war I consist of ... the one is good, the other evil ... Until very recently, however, despite reverses, it was possible for me to imagine that the most improbable would happen (the most probable would be eternal war), which always seemed like the radiant goal, and I, grown pitiful and wretched over the years, would at last be allowed to have you.

Suddenly it appears that the loss of blood was too great. The blood shed by the good one (the one that now seems good to us) in order to win you, serves the evil one. Where the evil one on his own would probably or possibly not have found a decisive new weapon for his defense, the good one offers him just that. For, secretly, I don’t believe this illness to be tuberculosis, at least not primarily tuberculosis, but rather a sign of my general bankruptcy ... The blood issues not from the lung, but from a decisive stab delivered by one of the combatants ...

And now I am going to tell you a secret ... I will never be well again. Simply because it is not the kind of tuberculosis that can be laid in a deckchair and nursed back to health, but a weapon that continues to be of supreme necessity as long as I remain alive. And both cannot remain alive (544-6).

In Kafka’s eyes the battle was over: the writer had defeated the husband, and the German had defeated the Jew. Yet, while Kafka would die within seven years (1924) from his spiritual and physical wound, the real victor in the battle for Kafka’s soul — as we know from the *Letters*, which Kafka never knew would survive³¹ — is Kafka the Jew.

To be sure, the victory is to a deracinated, uprooted, diaspora Jew. But Kafka finally achieves a posthumous victory of identity and commitment. The ultimate irony of his life is that while Kafka saw the battle as a lost one, the limited victory he in fact achieved in his quest for a Jewish identity may enable other Jews to understand their predicament more fully, and perhaps realize in their lives what Kafka could only understand and express in his art, but was unable to experience in his life.

Immunocompetence During Stress, Bereavement, and Depression: Focus on Neuroendocrine Regulation,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 144, No. 9, September 1987).

31. Kafka gave instructions that his work should be destroyed after his death, but his good friend, Max Brod, defied that order, as did others like Felice Bauer who possessed parts of his literary legacy (“Kafka’s True Will, an Introductory Essay,” by Erich Heller, in *Letters to Felice*, pp. vii-ix; see also n. 4, above).

How The Angels Do Serve

DAVID E. FASS

I

THE CONTINUED SURVIVAL OF THE JEWISH

people in spite of almost two thousands years of exile and oppression is one of the more unusual chapters in the annals of human history. Even more astonishing is that we were usually able to maintain our emotional health, family structure, and social order in the face of multiple forces that militated for their dissolution. To do so, the Jewish religious continuum institutionalized a pervasive value system that helped turn necessity into virtue, and provided an often despised people with a sense of individual self-esteem and communal purpose.

We find evidence of this value system and its workings in places where we might least expect them. One of the most interesting is in the rabbinic literature concerning angels. Starting from an initial Biblical understanding of angels as God's "administrative assistants" and heavenly court, Jewish angelology in the Middle Ages moved toward seeing them as agents of "white," (i.e., good or helpful) magic, though such categories themselves were actually rejected by Jewish thought.¹ In between, the rabbis used angels to teach a powerful and sustaining lesson: the Jewish people remained beloved of God, even more so than the heavenly hosts. This would remain true as long as the Jewish family and the communal structure were maintained through the observance of the commandments.

The fairly widespread angelology of the *Tanakh* consists primarily of two elements. The first holds that "... the appearance of angels is nothing else but the manifestation of the activity of Divinity in the world of the senses. They are messengers, or the impersonal acts of Divine Providence."² Even Maimonides, who wished to limit the understanding of angels as a separate category of being, who saw them as entirely incorporeal and who equated them with the Intelligences, was forced to accept the concept of angels as "messengers." Such language was necessary, he begrudgingly admitted, only because of the limits of human understanding and the need, therefore, to distinguish angels from God.³

1. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Temple Books, Atheneum, 1975), p. 22, and throughout.

2. Angelo S. Rappoport, *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1966), vol. 1, p. 29.

3. Moses Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, II:6, I:49.

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The second element viewed angels as the retinue of the heavenly court, as seen, for example, by Micaiah (I Kings 22:19) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-3). Although it is tempting to speculate that such beings constituted an ancient Israelite pantheon and/or a transformation of the gods of the pagan nations, the disjunction was so radical, claims Kaufmann, as to make such a concept meaningless. The angels "have ceased to be gods and have become mere agents of the One . . . No angel has sufficient identity to enable us to see him in his pagan original."⁴

Only late in the Biblical period, with the Book of Daniel, did angels begin to develop names and personalities. Jewish sources attribute this development to the Babylonian captivity⁵ and subsequent contact with the Persian pantheon.⁶ As the rabbinic period progressed, the literature of angelology became more and more extensive. Such material, however, for reasons that remain unknown, is entirely absent from the Mishnah.⁷

The angels are a powerful and important part of creation. They are inhabitants of heaven,⁸ so mighty that no human can endure the sound of their voices or withstand their fiery breath.⁹ They assist God in the performance of good works.¹⁰ Among their functions as God's servants are included pleading on behalf of the righteous,¹¹ being the guardians of individuals¹² as well as of the seventy nations,¹³ and being involved with both life and death.¹⁴

In light of all the material depicting the angels as such sublime agents of God's providence and the holy retinue of the celestial court, it is surprising to find depictions of them as limited and less than perfect. Such citations are neither few nor far between.

The angels are subject to error, mistaking Adam for God,¹⁵ and not knowing where the place of God's glory might be though they are standing right next to the Divine Throne.¹⁶ They are limited to only one task at a time.¹⁷ While so engaged, they must leave their angelic status behind, and are called "men" until they are done and have returned once again on high.¹⁸

4. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, translated and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 63.

5. *J.R.H.* 1:2.

6. Rappoport, *Op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

7. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1973), p. 109.

8. *B. San.* 20b; *B. Ket.* 104a.

9. *Cant. Rab.* 5:10; *B. Hag.* 14b; *B. Shab.* 88b.

10. *Num. Rab.* 11:7.

11. *B. Sota* 12b.

12. *B. Hag.* 16a; *B. Ber.* 60b.

13. *Pirke d'Rebbe Eliezer* (hereafter *PRE*), chap. 24.

14. *Gen. Rab.* 9:10.

15. *Gen. Rab.* 8:10.

16. *PRE*, chap. 4.

17. *B. B.M.* 86b.

18. *The Torah Anthology* (hereafter, *TA*), *Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez*, by Rabbi Yaakov Culi, trans.

Having no fixed names of their own, the angels are assigned names temporarily, based on the task that they are called upon to perform.¹⁹ They are not allowed to do anything on their own initiative, but only at God's behest.²⁰ Angels are only two-dimensional creatures, having a front but no back.²¹ Their nature is not fixed, but varies according to their assigned function.²² Though some of the angels are eternal, many are not, coming into existence for only a single day and then perishing.²³ With the exception of the angel Gabriel, who knows all languages, the other angels do not know Aramaic. Hence, one should not pray in Aramaic, since it is the angels who are supposed to carry our prayers up to heaven.²⁴ Angels came into being like all other created things.²⁵

As startling as the material on angelic fallibility is, even more astonishing is a large body of work in which the angels are seen as inferior to humans. Pious humans like Adam are said to rank higher in holiness than the ministering angels,²⁶ and generally are more powerful than they are.²⁷ Next to God's abode at the height of the seventh heaven comes the place of the pious human souls, and the angels come next below them.²⁸ The dignity of these pious ones is greater than that of the angels,²⁹ and a human being who does not engage in magic gains access to a place in heaven to which even the angels cannot aspire.³⁰

When Adam was in the Garden of Eden, some of the angels were required to wait on him by roasting meat for him and filtering his wine.³¹ It seems that Adam was even mistakenly worshipped by the angels as the image of God,³² probably because they were inferior in intelligence to him.³³ When Rabbi Joshua taught about the mysteries of God's throne, the angels were drawn by their curiosity to gather about and listen.³⁴ As in the past, so in the future, the righteous of the human family will still be closer to God's throne than will the angels,

by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (N.Y.: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1977), vol. 2, p. 220.

19. Rashi *ad* Gen. 32:29.

20. *TA*, vol. 3, pp. 137-8.

21. *Gen. Rab.* 49:7.

22. *PRE*, chap. 4.

23. *B. Hag.* 14b; *Gen. Rab.* 78:1.

24. *B. Sota* 33a.

25. *Gen. Rab.* 1:3.

26. *Gen. Rab.* 21:1.

27. *TA*, vol. 3, p. 138.

28. *B. Hag.* 12b.

29. *B. San.* 93a.

30. *B. Ned.* 32a.

31. *B. San.* 59b.

32. *Gen. Rab.* 8:10.

33. *PRE*, chap. 13.

34. *B. Hag.* 14b.

and they will teach them God's pronouncements on a daily basis.³⁵ Moses was able to eat the food of the angels, making him at least their equal, and probably their superior.³⁶ He was not only able to kill one of them, but dispatched the angel Kemuel with a single blow.³⁷ When Moses' brother Aaron entered the Holy of Holies, the ministering angels who were there had to flee before him.³⁸

In the realm of worship, supposedly a primary function of the angels as members of the heavenly court, we find some of the most interesting passages concerning human superiority. Although all the praises of the angelic choirs are immediately available, God prefers our prayers.³⁹ Angels must wait until we finish the recitation of the *Shema*,⁴⁰ and can offer their praises only at night because, during the day, God is busy listening to the prayers of Israel.⁴¹ Even when we usurp the angels' prerogatives and sing their song of praise, the *Kedushah*, they must wait patiently and silently until we finish.⁴²

Angels have a problem with prayer in general. The angel Sandalphon, whose function it is to weave wreaths for God out of the prayers of the righteous, is not even allowed to see the results of his labors. His finished wreaths rise up of their own accord and find God's hidden abode, beyond the angel's sight.⁴³ When his compatriots offer their own prayers they have to shout, since they can never be sure whether or not God hears them. Humans, on the other hand, can even pray silently, since we are assured that our prayers are heard and God is always listening.⁴⁴ Even the prayers of a penitent human as wicked as Menasseh reach God by a special passage beneath the throne of glory.⁴⁵

Finally, humans are seen as morally superior to the angels. Although not subject to sin and the moral dilemmas of the human realm because angels are free of the *yezer ha-ra*, the evil inclination,⁴⁶ this turns out to be a mark of their moral inferiority. Schechter quotes a remarkable late Midrash in which God is displeased with the creation of both beasts and angels: "If the angels follow my will," said God, "it is only on account of their inability to act in the opposite direction."⁴⁷

35. *Deut. Rab.* 1:12.

36. *Gen. Rab.* 48:14.

37. *Pesikta Rabbati* (hereafter *Pes. Rab.*), 20:4.

38. *Pes. Rab.* 47:4.

39. *TA*, vol. 9, pp. 29-30.

40. *Gen. Rab.* 65:21.

41. *B. Hag.* 12b.

42. *TA*, vol. 9, p. 212.

43. *Pes. Rab.* 20:4.

44. *TA*, vol. 16, p. 79.

45. *B. San.* 103a; *Deut. Rab.* 2:20.

46. *Gen. Rab.* 48:11.

47. Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 81.

God's sovereignty came to exist, therefore, not on account of the angels, who cannot sin, but on account of humans who possess free will.⁴⁸

Although the Torah initially was with the angels on high, it was wasted on them since they have no need of its moral directives, as Moses tellingly convinced them.⁴⁹ They are less able than we are to wrestle with moral dilemmas and, when angels have tried, the results have often been disastrous. In one source, just such a failure on the part of the heavenly hosts is proposed as the cause of the flood in the time of Noah.⁵⁰ Conversely, when human beings act righteously and perform good deeds, the result is often the creation of a new angel.⁵¹

II

How are we to understand this material? Scholars have long assumed that the surprising twists and turns which the fortunes of the angels have taken in Jewish sources can be attributed to various polemical and apologetic purposes. One analysis sees the proliferation of angelology as an attempt to reconcile Babylonian mythology with Jewish legends. The former was denuded of any possible claim to divinity by being ascribed, instead, to the realm of angels.⁵² The varying positions on human/angelic superiority/inferiority were "apparently influenced by contemporary trends."⁵³

It is elsewhere suggested that the increased importance of the angels was a reaction to, and a solution of, the problem of God's radical transcendence:

The more the theological spirit of the age raised God to the heaven of heavens, the more the folk peopled the lower spheres with angels, spirits, and emanations of the world-soul.⁵⁴

The New Testament proposed (Acts 23:8) that the Pharisees acknowledged the existence of such beings as angels, while the Sadducees taught the opposite. However, the dispute may actually have involved a Sadducaic denial of the appropriateness of giving to angels names and personalities, rather than a refusal to admit their existence.⁵⁵

Some of the human ends that angels have served, though political, seem rather simple, almost naive. Already noted was the *aggadah* that, except for Gabriel, the angels did not know Aramaic.⁵⁶ Since angels

48. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

49. *B. Shab.* 88b-89a.

50. *TA*, vol. 15, pp. 220-223.

51. *TA*, vol. 11, p. 398.

52. Joshua Gutmann, "Angels and Angelology: Apocrypha," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: The MacMillan Company, 1972), vol. 2, p. 961.

53. Arthur Marmorstein, "Angels and Angelology: Angels in the Talmud and Midrash," *Ibid.*, p. 969.

54. Daniel Jeremy Silver, *A History of Judaism* (N.Y.: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), p. 202.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

56. *B. Sota* 33a.

had to bring the prayers of humankind before the Divine Throne, they had to be offered in a language that the angels understood or they could not fulfill their task. The language of choice, then, was Hebrew. Not incidentally, such material helped preserve Hebrew as the language of prayer after the vernacular had some Aramaic.⁵⁷

Angelology has also served far more serious purposes in the field of power politics. One analysis equates the myth of the fallen angels in I Enoch 6-11 with the corrupting marriages engaged in by the priesthood.⁵⁸ Since the angels served as intercessors between humans and God, this made them an apt analog for the priests, who served a similar function.⁵⁹ The setting for this political use of angelology is the tension in the third century B.C.E. between the scribes and priests as they jockeyed for leadership.⁶⁰

Ephraim Urbach gives an even more complex analysis of the polemic and apologetic purposes that the angels served. The original intent of the rabbis was to use angels polemically to counter anthropomorphic material, which they found uncomfortable. However, an intercessory layer of beings between humans and God skated dangerously close to the thin ice of the Christian trinity. It was "the polemical need that decided the issue,"⁶¹ and that need pushed for the elimination of the angelic material, or at least its diminution. This, in turn, operated most when the subject matter concerned Israel as a totality. When the sources were more concerned with the individual, the anti-anthropomorphic tendency was uppermost and the angelic material remained.⁶²

The Christian world, in turn, used the Jewish concept that the righteous are greater than the angels to counter the view that Jesus was only a messenger or an angel. Jewish sources, of course, insisted that God had no "son" and that any such references did, in fact, refer to angels instead.⁶³

Further need to downgrade the importance of the angels arose as part of the rabbinic polemic against both the gnostics and even certain Jewish sources such as Philo. The former taught that the world was created by the angels, which the rabbis strenuously denied, while Philo carefully contended that it was the angels who created the negative

57. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 49.

58. David Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Unity in I Enoch 6-16," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (Cinn., Ohio: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1979), vol. L, p. 116.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

61. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 153.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-4.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9.

parts of human beings and, hence, are a source of the evil in the cosmos. This, too, the rabbis rejected.⁶⁴

The angels, it seems, were fertile ground for any number of polemic and apologetic purposes. It is probable that their imaginary and mythological character helped fuel the creative uses to which they were put. Nor were those uses uni-directional. The myth of the angels

should be seen as existing on its own plane of reference with a reciprocal relationship to society: not only does the myth reflect a certain attitude *toward society*, it also draws *from society* a system of encoding that is used to spell out the specific terms of the narrative.⁶⁵

Although the operation of this reciprocity did, indeed, produce the polemics and apologetics already noted, the rabbinic material on angelic limits and human superiority had an even more important role to play, which begins to take shape as we examine the angels' attitudes toward humans. Many of them are opposed even to the creation of humanity, arguing with God against Adam's creation.⁶⁶ Rashi assumes that God discussed this creation with the angels in the first place only because He knew there would be opposition and jealousy.⁶⁷

The angels are proponents of a strict, unforgiving justice, opposing repentance, denouncing the sinner, and demanding immediate punishment.⁶⁸ They are defensively territorial, complaining when Moses ascends to their heavenly domain to receive the Torah,⁶⁹ and possessive about the Torah itself, unwilling to allow Moses to receive it.⁷⁰

The resolutions of these instances of angelic animosity towards humanity embody powerful and far-reaching values. God tried to prevent angelic opposition to the creation of Adam by hiding from them the negative attributes that humans would possess.⁷¹ That proved impossible, and the angels grouped themselves into contingents, pro and con. Love said yes, Truth said no. Righteousness said yes, Peace said no. God then threw Truth to the ground.⁷² Why Truth? As if to say that though what the angels said about humans was, indeed, true, there is a higher value, God's love for us, that takes precedence. Then, the Midrash drives the point home by going on to say that, as the angelic argument continued, God turned to them and asked, "Why are you still arguing? I have already created Adam."⁷³ God simply ignores the angels, correct though their arguments may be.

64. Ibid., pp. 203-5.

65. Suter, *Op. cit.*, emphasis in original.

66. *Gen. Rab.* 8:5.

67. Rashi *ad Gen.* 1:26.

68. *Midrash Tehillim* 94:4.

69. *B. Shab.* 88b.

70. Ibid.

71. *Gen. Rab.* 8:4.

72. *Gen. Rab.* 8:5.

73. Ibid.

The angelic opposition to repentance is decisively defused in a “worst case” scenario. Who was more wicked than Manasseh? When he found himself in distress and sought to repent, the angels shut up the entrances to heaven and argued that there could be no repentance for one who set up an idolatrous image in the very sanctuary. God’s response was to provide a special passage right below the Throne of Glory through which Manasseh’s penitential prayers could be heard on high.⁷⁴ If even the repentance of the evil Manasseh reaches heaven, due to God’s special care, certainly all other, simply fallible, humans can rest assured that theirs is heard as well.

Angelic territoriality and possessiveness are likewise overcome. When the angels object to Moses’ ascending to heaven to receive the Torah, God instructs him on how to answer their objections, once again demonstrating human superiority. The core of Moses’ argument stresses that we need the Torah precisely because of our “imperfections.” His arguments are telling ones, and they silence the angels. But, they do more than that. Not only do the angels agree to allow Moses to take the Torah back to earth with their blessing, they each give him a gift or a secret, even the Angel of Death!⁷⁵

A final, decisive position on the conflicts for priority of status between angels and humankind is found in a number of places. When Israel stood at Mount Sinai deliberating whether or not to accept the Torah, God informed the works of creation, including the angels, that if Israel accepted the Torah, well and good. If not, God would turn all creation back into nothingness.⁷⁶ There is an even more extreme version in which God berates the angels about their refusal to let Moses bring Israel the Torah: “. . . if Israel does not receive the Torah, there shall be no abiding place — neither for Me nor for you.”⁷⁷ Lest there be any doubt, the disciples of R. Akiba expand on their master’s teaching and hear God proclaim that Israel is more beloved than the ministering angels, more honored, greater, holier, and more praiseworthy.⁷⁸ This wonderful status, however, depends upon Israel’s fulfillment of its Divinely appointed task: the observance of the commandments.⁷⁹

What we are seeing here is the crucial and far-reaching purpose to which the material on angels was put. The angels, in general, are an analog for the situation in which Israel found itself throughout most of the rabbinic period. There was always another “layer” between the Jews and self-determination, whether Roman, or Babylonian. These nations were, like the angels, more powerful than the Jews, and, since the

74. *Pesikta d’Rav Kahana* 24:11.

75. *B. Shab.* 88b-89a.

76. *Ibid.*, 88a.

77. *Pes. Rab.* 20:4.

78. *Avot de Rabbi Natan* “B”, chap. 44.

79. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 156.

prophets, messengers of God's policies on earth, again like the angels. Jewish angelology, then, demonstrates Israel's attempts to grapple with the need for self-esteem and survival in the face of a loss of sovereignty.

Max Kadushin suggests that "Angelology . . . acts as background for bringing into stronger relief God's love for Israel and the holiness of Israel."⁸⁰ Urbach sees clearly that "[t]he preference accorded to Israel [over the angels] is linked to the idea of election."⁸¹ Indeed it is, and more. This material constitutes part of the struggle for the very soul of Israel, a struggle in which the leadership had to take sides. Schechter notes that it was the nationalistic school that objected to the teaching of the inferiority of the angels.⁸²

Why? Because the nationalists were not interested in stifling Jewish anger at the more powerful nations, not interested in pacification, which is exactly what these values promoted. The angelology was exactly the opposite of rebellion and revolution. Here was a clear and powerful message that those who seemed to be so high and mighty were actually deeply flawed. Not only were they flawed, they were actually inferior to God's beloved, chosen people. To maintain that status and receive the reward that was ultimately to be theirs, the Jews had to worry not about the mighty ones, but only about themselves, their community, and the keeping of the commandments. In each sentence, the analogy works perfectly whether we use "angels" or "Romans/Babylonians."

So embedded in rabbinic literature did these positions become that they became almost as unnoticeable as the background noise in a room or the air we breathe. But their effect was far from minimal. These were part of the values that enabled the Jewish people to survive the Diaspora and the horrors that it contained. We were assured that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, our tormentors were the ones who were flawed, we were better than they were, God loved us more, and what was needed to reap our ultimate reward was not rebellion against our oppressors, but continued obedience to the commandments.

In the face of the overwhelming might of the Roman Empire, and with the clear vision of hindsight, we might well judge that the rabbinic values promoting survival rather than rebellion were, indeed, correct. With the end of forced *galut* and the onset once again of Jewish sovereignty in Israel, perhaps it is time to look again at values such as these that are embodied in both our literature and our religion. They functioned to great effect, and kept our souls relatively sane and our communities fairly functional. But, after so many centuries, it is possible, even probable, that their utility has greatly diminished. The angels have served us well. It may now be time to examine that service anew.

80. Max Kadushin, *A Conceptual Approach to the Mekhilla* (N.Y.: Jonathan David, for the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), p. 106.

81. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

82. Schechter, *Op. cit.*, p. 49, n. 2.

Symbols, Reality, and God: Heschel's Rejection of a Tillichian Understanding of Religious Symbols

AARON L. MACKLER

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL'S STRONG repudiation of religious symbolism presents a puzzle. His thought is marked by sensitivity to the richness and complexity of the world, and of the human experience of God. He sees our understandings of reality and of God as necessarily partial, finite approximations of the infinite, as verbal formulations of the ineffable.

For Paul Tillich, the impossibility of fully and directly expressing reality in our words and concepts leaves us with symbols, which partially and indirectly express reality, as the basis of religion and of all that is most important in life. Heschel, however, vehemently rejects the expression of religion through symbols, considering this to be a reduction of God to a fiction, and of religion to "child's play."¹ Part of Heschel's rejection is due to an understanding of symbols that is much more limited than that of Tillich. More basically, though, Heschel would reject even Tillich's sophisticated understanding of symbols as the medium of religion, because Heschel's God, Who transcends reality, also actively involves Himself in the world and in our lives, and has, in fact, communicated His will to man.²

A comparison of Tillich's and Heschel's positions on symbols and religious language reveals many similarities between the two thinkers, so that Heschel's strong denunciations of symbols may sometimes be seen to involve rhetorical overstatement. At the same time, such comparison clarifies the basis of Heschel's rejection of a Tillichian under-

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 129. While explicit references to his contemporary interlocutors are frustratingly rare in Heschel's writings, Heschel's discussion of symbolism seems clearly to have been intended as a response to Tillich's views, and is best understood as such. John C. Merkle observes the phenomenon of Heschel offering "an obvious, though unnoted, reply to Paul Tillich;" *The Genesis of Faith* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 245n, 183. In any event, the comparison of the positions is instructive for the understanding of Heschel's views.

2. Following Heschel's usage, the term "man" is used in a gender-neutral sense to connote humanity and the individual human.

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standing of symbolism: namely, that such symbolism fails to account for, and to contribute to, the dynamic relationship between God and man.

The Limits of Expression

For Heschel, the world is greater than that which we can understand, and our experience more than we can express.

All conceptualization is symbolization, an act of accommodation of reality to the human mind. The living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization, on a level that is responsive, immediate, preconceptual, and presymbolic.³

In Fritz Rothschild's image, "no conceptual system can catch in its net the whole of reality without a remainder."⁴

The complexity and richness of Heschel's understanding of the world is reflected in the polarities and apparent paradoxes that characterize his work. Religion and philosophy, halakhah and aggadah, *keva* (regularity) and *kavanah* (spontaneity), the world views of the Hasidism of Mezbizh and Kotsk, all co-exist in dynamic tension. No single value or force is adequate to express the complexity of reality. Heschel asserts that "the human mind is one-sided. It can never grasp all of reality at once."⁵ The imagery of polarity and dialectic provides the best approximation of reality, and helps to convey its complexity and dynamic potential.

Appropriately, a polarity is used to alert the reader to yet another level, transcending that of reality and human experience: God.

The impenetrable fog in which the world is clad is God's disguise. To know God means to sense display in His disguise and to be aware of the disguise in His most magnificent display. God is within the world, present and concealed in the essence of things.⁶

Our concepts and understandings, which fall short even of our experience of the world, must fail utterly in any attempt to describe God.

Accordingly, our expressions of the ultimate are those of allusion and understatement. A word such as

"revelation" is like an exclamation; it is an indicative rather than a descriptive term. Like all terms that express the ultimate, it points to its meaning rather than fully rendering it. [Similarly,] the attempt to convey what we see and cannot say is the everlasting theme of mankind's un-

3. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), p. 115.

4. Fritz A. Rothschild, Introduction, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism from the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, 1975), p.13.

5. Heschel, *Search*, p. 14.

6. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), p. 149.

finished symphony, a venture in which adequacy is never achieved. There is an eternal disparity between the ultimate and man's power of expression.⁷

The Role of Symbols

Paul Tillich, in his discussion of religious symbols, seems to be making exactly the same point. For him, the ultimate infinitely transcends the finite and our finite powers of expression. Accordingly, "symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate." Symbols point past themselves to that which is beyond them, at the same time that they participate in that to which they point. They are thus able to open up new dimensions of reality for us, as well as involve depths of our soul. However, because of the impossibility of the task of representing the ultimate, symbols are inherently flawed. We attempt to utilize symbols so as to represent the ultimate most adequately, while avoiding the idolatrous understanding of the symbol as ultimate in itself.⁸

Heschel shares important elements of Tillich's understanding of symbols. "A real symbol is a visible object that represents something invisible; something present representing something absent," which may make that thing (e.g., the Divine) present by partaking in its reality. Such a symbol, though powerful, is dangerous, for it may idolatrously be understood to be equivalent to the Divine.⁹ It would seem appropriate, therefore, for Heschel to accept symbols with caution, insisting that we remain aware that they represent only part of reality and only an echo of God. The relationship of symbol to reality/ultimacy might be analogous to that which Heschel elsewhere describes between question and problem. A problem is urgent and very real, confronting us in our life situation.

To clarify, to study, and to communicate a problem we must put it into words, for without translating the moments of wondering into logical terms there would be no possibility of testing the trans-subjective validity of what is thought in these moments, nor the possibility of its intersubjective communication. Yet the act of verbalization extracts the problem from the situation in which it arises. The question verbalized, however, must not be equated with the problem confronting us.

Questions are crucial, though we must choose our questions carefully, and constantly remain aware that the real situation transcends their formulation.¹⁰ Similarly, Heschel could be expected to agree with Tillich

7. Heschel, *Search*, p. 185; *Quest*, p. 139.

8. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 41-47. See also Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), esp. vol. 1, pp. 238ff.

9. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 128.

10. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp. 1-2.

that symbols are crucial, though we must choose our symbols carefully, and constantly remain aware of their imperfect character.

For Heschel, though, the imperfect nature of symbols not only warrants caution in their use, but disqualifies them from any serious role in religious life. At times he presents his argument as if it were a syllogism. "A symbol is by definition not the ultimate; it is the representative of something else. What is ultimate is not translated into symbols; the ultimate is an antonym of the symbolic." A symbol is simply a fiction; "what it accomplishes is to reduce belief to make-believe."¹¹ Such a vehement and simplistic rejection of symbols seems very much out of character for a thinker so attuned to the complexities of reality; who insists on observance of halakhah while realizing that it remains less than ultimate and may cause distortions; who asserts that "the cardinal sin in thinking about ultimate issues is literal-mindedness."¹²

To some extent, Heschel is utilizing a very different definition of symbol from that of Tillich. As seen above, though, Heschel is clearly aware of an understanding of symbol not altogether different from that expressed by Tillich. The issue is not simply one of semantics. Heschel's vehemence can only partially be explained as stemming from his non-Tillichian usage of symbol. To a greater extent, it is Heschel's vehement opposition to a Tillichian use of symbol that causes him rhetorically to attack symbolism by presenting it in caricatured form.

God's Active Communication

Heschel would seem to agree with Tillich that human attempts to understand reality on its own and to posit meaning in our lives can be expressed only through symbols. "Patient, pliant, and submissive to our minds is the world of nature, but obstinately silent. We adore her wealth and tacit wisdom, we tediously decipher her signs, but she never speaks to us." Similarly,

[t]hose who are in the dark in their lonely search for God; those to whom God is a problem, or a Being that is eternally absent and silent; those who ask, "How does one know Him? Where can one find Him? How does one express Him?" will be forced to accept symbols as an answer.

But the Bible is not a religion of an unknown God. It is built upon a rock of certainty that God has made known His will to His people. To us, the will of God is neither a metaphor nor a euphemism but more powerful and more real than our own experience.¹³

Even here, Heschel's presentation of the symbolist position is somewhat polemical. Still, it is clear that fundamental issues of the character of God and His relationship with man are involved in Heschel's rejection of a Tillichian understanding of the role of symbols.

11. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 141, 142.

12. Heschel, *Search*, pp. 178-179.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 172; Heschel, *Quest*, p. 131.

In comparison to Heschel, Tillich seems to accept an understanding of reality and being as relatively static and unchanging vis-à-vis man. Images of ground and structure characterize his discussion of being; while man's faith is dynamic in its attempt to express the infinite through the finite, the infinite itself remains basically unchanged. In contrast, Heschel insists on the fundamentally active character of at least some forms of existence, attacking understandings that too narrowly focus on the inanimate. A conception of existence as passive and unchanging represents, at best, a partial truth, for time and action are essential aspects of organic existence. To think of God as active is no more anthropomorphism than to think of God as passive is "physiorphism," a distorted understanding of God's existence as equivalent to that of inanimate objects.¹⁴

Existence may not only be fundamentally active, but may also involve concern. Reflexive concern characterizes the living cell, which is essentially active in defense of its own existence. "Just as the peculiar quality of inorganic existence is necessity and inertia, the peculiar asset of organic existence, or life, is concern." Human beings additionally exhibit concern for others, or transitive concern. Upon reflection it becomes clear that such concern is not just an accidental attribute found in many individuals, but an essential characteristic of existence in the human mode. As God is beyond the need for reflexive concern, transitive concern alone is properly ascribed to Him. Accordingly, "God's concern with concrete situations" need not be reconciled with an essentially inertial existence, but is a fundamental expression of His essentially active and concerned existence.¹⁵ As Rothschild concludes: "The divine concern is, therefore, a more basic category than being."¹⁶ Such a view contrasts sharply with that of Tillich, for whom being is absolutely basic; God "is th[e] structure [of being], and it is impossible to speak about Him except in terms of this structure."¹⁷

For Heschel, man is not left alone to search for meaning and direction in a complex universe — because God, Who Himself transcends that universe, reaches out to speak to man in revelation. "The Greeks

14. Heschel, *Alone*, pp. 136, 144. Heschel similarly argues against a view of unchanging being as ultimate in his *The Prophets* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), p. 264: "Biblical ontology does not separate being from doing. What is, acts . . . Here the basic category is action rather than immobility. Movement, creation of nature, acts within history rather than absolute transcendence and detachment from the events of history, are the attributes of the Supreme Being." For Tillich's view, see, e.g., his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 163 ff. Tillich's notion of being is more complex than the construal of being and existence attacked by Heschel; a full account of Tillich's position is beyond the scope of this paper. Still, the basic contrast holds, and here, as elsewhere, sheds light on Heschel's position.

15. Heschel, *Alone*, pp. 136-144.

16. Rothschild, p. 24; see *Search*, pp. 412.

17. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 238.

formulated the search for meaning as man in search of a thought; the Hebrews formulated the search for meaning as God's thought (or concern) in search of man." The intensity of God's pursuit of man eventuates in revelation, an event unique for God as well as for man.¹⁸ For Tillich, too, revelation represents an extraordinary event, "in which an ultimate concern grasps the human mind and creates a community in which this concern expresses itself in symbols of action, imagination, and thought."¹⁹ Heschel adds one crucial factor, transforming the nature of revelation and, thus, of our lives: God speaks.²⁰

Once God speaks, the human task is transformed from perception and expression of the ultimate, to understanding and responding to God's communication. And, while God's speech is more than human speech, it clearly has specific content, and holds great power.

"God spoke." Is it to be taken symbolically: He did not speak, yet it was as if He did? The truth is that what is literally true to us is a metaphor compared with what is metaphysically real to God. A thousand years to us are a day to Him. And, when applied to Him, our mightiest words are feeble understatements.

And yet, that "God spoke" is not a symbol. A symbol does not raise a world out of nothing. Nor does a symbol call a Bible into being. The speech of God is not less but more than literally real.²¹

Here, the speech of God assumes transcendent height, recalling the power of the classical *logos*, creating worlds and inspiring man. While God's word remains above us, though, it also reaches us on our level, with a certainty at once comforting and challenging. This is possible because God does not speak to us of the ultimate in itself, but of His will for our lives. "We may not comprehend the wisdom of God, but we are certain of understanding the will of God."²²

Certainty and Ambiguity

This certainty of the Divine communication is crucial for Heschel. "Let us never forget: If God is a symbol, He is a fiction. But if He is real, then He is able to express His will unambiguously." Accordingly, the commandments of the Decalogue are "utterly simple," and the Exodus from Egypt an "iron fact." "The soul of the religious man lives in the depth of certainty: 'This is what God wants me to do.' Where that certainty is dead, the most powerful symbolism will be futile."²³

Such simple certainty not only contrasts with Tillich's approach, but seems out of keeping with Heschel's own appreciation of the com-

18. Heschel, *Who*, p. 74; *Search*, p. 175.

19. Tillich, *Dynamics*, p. 78.

20. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 135.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 135; Heschel, *Search*, p. 180.

22. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 136.

23. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 144; *Search*, p. 192. *Quest*, pp. 143, 142.

plexity of reality, and of the necessarily tentative nature of any finite expression of the transcendent. God's word remains more than real, and the cardinal sin in matters involving ultimate issues remains literal-mindedness. Heschel realizes that God's word remains beyond us, and even beyond the Bible: "As a report on revelation, the Bible itself is a midrash." No expression of the Divine can itself possess ultimate certainty. "Criticism of religion must extend not only to its basic claims but to all of its statements. Religion is liable to distortion from without and to corruption from within." It would appear that Heschel would have to accept Tillich's claim that anything to which ultimate certainty is ascribed is *ipso facto* idolatrous. For Heschel, it becomes so not only in the sense of being false, but in cutting us off from the true God.²⁴ If it is necessary that we know God's word with absolute certainty, it is necessary that God's word transcend and elude us as well. We are firmly planted on the horns of a dilemma.

As noted above, though, dilemmas and polarities characterize Heschel's thought. The truth transcends any formulation, and complex truths transcend simple formulations. Thus, both the certainty of our knowing God's word, and the transcendence of God's word above our realm of certain possession, are crucial to our religious lives. Each pole of the dilemma is true, but neither represents the complete truth.

The dialectic involved in Heschel's understanding of revelation is similar to that which he describes elsewhere in his discussion of halakhah and aggadah, law and inwardness.

Jewish thinking and living can only be adequately understood in terms of a dialectic pattern, containing opposite or contrasted properties. As in a magnet, the ends of which have opposite magnetic qualities, these terms are opposite to one another and exemplify a polarity which lies at the very heart of Judaism . . . Taken abstractedly, all these terms seem to be mutually exclusive, yet in actual living they involve each other; the separation of the two is fatal to both. There is no halacha without aggada, and no aggada without halacha. We must neither disparage the body, nor sacrifice the spirit . . . The body without the spirit is a corpse; the spirit without the body is a ghost.²⁵

Heschel utilizes the same image in asserting the certainty of revelation. "Jewish tradition insists, the Biblical commandment must not be divested of *peshat*, of its naked meaning; without the reality of the naked word, the spirit is a ghost."²⁶ The Torah as self-reflexive icon might equally be considered a corpse. Such a polarity corresponds with the understanding of God's word as more than literally true. "No man can hear the voice of God as it is." We can at best perceive one aspect of His higher reality. And so the Torah in its present form is necessarily a lesser projection of His word; "the incomplete form of heavenly Wis-

24. Tillich, *Dynamics*, pp. 17 ff., 52; Heschel, *Search*, pp. 185, 10; cf. *Quest*, p. 138.

25. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 341.

26. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 133.

dom is the Torah.”²⁷ An analogy might be the projection of a three-dimensional object onto a two-dimensional plane; such a projection conveys the object, but neither completely nor precisely. Both the one who simply asserts that the Torah is precisely and literally true, and the one who denies that the Torah is literally true, are in error. Heschel will forcefully remind each claimant of the pole that is being neglected, for the truth includes and transcends both.

The partial understanding represented by each pole is not only incomplete, but potentially dangerous. An overly simplistic and literalist understanding of revelation as God’s word is not only demeaning to man’s role as an active partner in revelation, but demeaning of God. Like a literalist understanding of anthropomorphisms, such a view perverts our understanding of God and His word by reductively equating Him with our familiar concepts. “It is just as improper to conceive of revelation as a psycho-physical act as it is to conceive of God as a corporeal being.” A narrowly fundamentalist view of the Biblical Torah as God’s word may cut us off from appreciation of other dimensions of experience of God and His word, and from the developing and continuous understanding that God’s word invites. The Oral Torah, in the sense of the accumulated insights and interpretations of the Jewish tradition, adds a crucial dimension. Still, God’s word, and the Oral Torah in the deepest sense, extend beyond the Oral Torah of tradition as well.²⁸

Dangers are also posed by a simple denial of the truth of revelation and of God’s word as we know it. While the Torah in its present form is an “incomplete form of heavenly Wisdom” and is not a perfect equivalent of God’s word, it is the most perfect expression that we have, and, as such, is invaluable. We sense God’s presence in the Bible, albeit in a mediated way. The insights of the Torah contribute crucially to our experience of God in the world, and in the performance of sacred deeds. A view of God’s word as less than literally real, even more than a view of God’s word as we have it as simply and literally true, is likely to impoverish our experience of God and cut us off from His presence.²⁹ Heschel’s sense of the dangers of a view of God’s word as less than literally real accounts for his insistence, even to the point of exaggeration, on the reality and certainty of our possession of God’s word. It contributes as well to his attack, even to the point of caricature, on Tillich’s understanding of religious symbolism. The most appropriate account of our experience of God and His word must acknowledge both the reality and the limitations of our knowledge of God’s word, reflecting the nuances and dialectic involved. Heschel vigorously attacks partial views as not only incomplete, but misleading, and threatening to that experience.

27. Heschel, *Search*, pp., 261-262, quoting *Genesis Rabba*, 17, 5.

28. Heschel, *Search*, pp. 259-261, 187, 273-276.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 30-32.

Our experience of God is not only a treasure to be safeguarded, but also a resource for our understanding of God, providing a certainty and richness beyond that which our reasoning and our words can account for. As Rothschild notes, Heschel as empiricist claims that we apprehend more than we comprehend. As seen above, Heschel asserts that our "living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization;" our experience is both prior to, and irreducible to, our rational analysis. We do not "owe all we know to discursive thinking... Just as the mind is able to form conceptions supported by sense perception, it can derive insights from the dimension of the ineffable." Thus, we may achieve certainty on a matter without being able to provide proof. "Indeed, there is no perception that may not be suspected of being a delusion. But there are perceptions which are so staggering as to render meaningless the raising of such a suspicion." While the Bible provides paradigms of such perceptive experiences, such experiences may be found in the lives of each person. "The certainty of being exposed to a presence not of the world is a fact of human existence." In such a sense we perceive transcendent meaning as "something immediately given, logically and psychologically prior to judgment; ... a universal insight into an objective reality of which all men are at times capable." The cultivation of such insights and experiences, and their development into a rich relationship with God and a life lived in accordance with His will, represent a crucial goal of Heschel's work.³⁰

Faith and Love

The experience of God, that Heschel both appeals to and cultivates, is not only that of the empiricist. It is that of the lover as well.

To religion, the immediate certainty of faith is more important than all metaphysical reflection, and the pious man must regard religious symbolism as a form of solipsism, and just as he who loves a person does not love a symbol or his own idea of the person but the person himself, so he who loves and fears God is not satisfied with worshiping a symbol or worshiping symbolically.³¹

Such love is not only a powerful subjective state, but demands expression through real actions. "In rendering a service to a friend, I am not primarily conscious of carrying out an act which should symbolize my friendship; the act is friendship."³² Specific actions make up the substance of the relationship, and thus have intrinsic meaning and worth, even if they also reflect on the greater context of the relationship. Ac-

30. Rothschild, p. 13; Heschel, *Search*, pp. 58, 115; *Alone*, pp. 16-17; *Search*, p. 196; *Who*, p. 77.

31. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 129.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

cordingly, Jewish observance represents a response to God, and *mizvot* provide moments of meeting in the relationship of God and man.³³

In Heschel's presentation, the approach of symbolism fails most radically in the connection of faith with love and the concrete activity of relationship. Tillich, however, seems to agree on this connection as central to our lives. "Faith as the state of being ultimately concerned implies love and determines action. It is the ultimate power behind both of them."³⁴ While differing uses of terms make Heschel and Tillich seem father apart than they in fact are on basic issues related to symbolism, here shared terms make them appear deceptively close. For Tillich, love is "the moving power of life," an aspect of being; God is best understood not as a loving person, but as love itself. Human love flowing from faith is expressed toward other humans, and toward God as ground of being.³⁵ For Heschel, love is crucially that of the mutual relationship of man with a personal, loving God.

Tillich asserts that "symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate," for the ultimate transcends literal expression.³⁶ Heschel agrees that the ultimate is ineffable and beyond the grasp of literal description; however, for him, the language of the ultimate is not meant to be expressive, but rather, must be indicative. The function of indicative words

is not to call up a definition in our minds but to introduce us to a reality which they signify... What they call forth is not so much a memory but a response... Words used in this sense must neither be taken literally nor figuratively, but responsively."³⁷

Such language is appropriate to Heschel's understanding of God, reality, and human expression. The word of God is neither literally true in a simple sense, nor is it only figuratively true, but it is more than literally true. Reality transcends our concepts, and God transcends the reality of the world; but concern is a more basic category than being, and so our living relationship with God takes precedence over our understanding. Heschel would probably agree that human words can express the ultimate only symbolically, and so a Tillichian understanding of the role of symbols, as at least a partial truth, would be appropriate to his position. Yet Heschel's rejection of this view of symbols must be understood as well. For Heschel, God has given His word to humanity, providing an expression of ultimacy fuller than that which man could formulate on his own. As crucially, the importance of words lies not so much in what they express, as in how they enrich our relation-

33. Ibid., pp. 136, 139.

34. Tillich, *Dynamics*, p. 117.

35. Ibid., Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 23, 109; *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 279 ff.

36. Tillich, *Dynamics*, p. 41.

37. Heschel, *Search*, p. 182.

ships, and in what responses they evoke in us. Heschel vehemently rejects Tillich's terminology of symbolism because Heschel's understanding of a loving God, Who communicates His will to us, judges such a description to be inaccurate. Even more importantly, Tillich's terminology fails by Heschel's criteria of indicative language. The task of our discussion of the ultimate is to introduce us to a transcendent reality, and to evoke responses appropriate to a relationship of love with the living God.

The Hermeneutics of Heschel in Torah min Hashamayim

REBECCA SCHORSCH

WARNINGS AGAINST THE WRITING DOWN OF the Oral Torah originated in response to the earliest efforts at recording the words of the Rabbis. Despite these statements, many Talmudic tractates, midrashic compilations and legal codes were compiled. Abraham Joshua Heschel, in *God in Search of Man*, recalls several of these rabbinic statements — “Those who write down the halacha are like those who burn the Torah” and “he who writes down the aggada loses his share in the world to come” — in conjunction with Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk’s question, “[H]ow could the ancient Rabbis abolish the fundamental principle of Judaism, not to write down what is to be kept as an oral tradition, on the basis of a single verse [119:126] from the book of Psalms?” That which the Rabbis justified on the basis of scriptural exegesis, Heschel explains differently. Appearances notwithstanding, “. . . the Oral Torah was never written down. The meaning of the Torah has never been contained by books.”¹

If, in fact, the true nature of the Oral Torah renders impossible any attempt to codify, systematize and, thereby, exhaust the meaning of the Oral tradition, how are we to write authoritatively about rabbinic theology? How could Heschel write about the development of rabbinic aggadah, of rabbinic theology, in his *Torah min Hashamayim be-ispaklaria shel ha-dorot*,² when the content undermines the task that he sets out to accomplish? If Heschel, indeed, believes that written volumes cannot express the meaning of the Torah, why does he attempt a comprehensive written formulation of rabbinic theology? While it appears that Heschel’s subject was rabbinic theology, we will see that his two volumes are best characterized as a mastery of rabbinic form. Indeed, the content and the form are one and the same. This accords with Heschel’s understanding of revealed Torah, an understanding which imposes a certain interpretive methodology upon the Jewish exegete. The substance of that revelation, in Heschel’s opinion, is infinite, bespeaking its expression in form alone, since it cannot be contained as substantive content. Form, i.e., engaging in exegesis, ceases to be a means to understanding the meaning of Torah but becomes an end in itself — a vertical connection with God, an im-

1. A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1956), pp. 275-276.

2. London: Soncino Press, 1962.

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mediate link with the Holy. The hermeneutical effort becomes an encounter with, and an experience of, the Holy.

Torah min Hashamayim differs from Heschel's other philosophic accounts of Judaism and of God, with respect both to the scope of the task and the related role of the author. Unlike many of his other essays and books, Heschel here purports to write a history, to trace the evolution of the two paradigmatic theological strands of Rabbis Akiva and Yishmael. His polemical intent is to redress the wrong done to the aggadic material — to demonstrate that it is as diverse and as integral a part of Judaism as is halakhah. The opening section of the introduction ends with his formulation of the problem:

... [T]his study leading to action, should we say that it consists entirely of halacha, and it concerns itself only with things of action? And the aggada, the wise sayings of the heart, what is its place in the study of Torah?³

I would like to suggest that Heschel never intended to write an objective, analytical history of rabbinic theology. He does not write an academic account, analyzing his subject matter with the methodological scrutiny demanded of modern historiography. He does not view his material at a distance in order to critique and evaluate it objectively.⁴ In *Torah min Hashamayim*, Heschel merges with his material, he becomes a part of the tradition of rabbinic scriptural exegesis, linking man with the Divine, the text. It is not until the preface to the second volume, however, that we come across what may be a clue to understanding the personal, religious motivation underlying Heschel's work. Earlier, in the preface to volume I, he suggests that the time has come to balance the scales, to recover the discarded aggadic material, thereby correcting the mistaken impression that the Rabbis did not address theological issues or, to use Heschel's term, issues of the heart.⁵ By the second volume it becomes evident that he brings the theological aggadic material to the fore because of his conception of man's active participation and continual role in the eternal dialectic of God's revelation. He orients the reader for the second volume by ending the preface with a telling quotation from Nahmanides' introduction to *Sefer Hamizvot*:

If I yearn and desire to be a student of the Rishonim, to fulfill their words ... to wear them as a chain around my neck, and as a bracelet for my wrist, I will not be for them as a donkey forever carrying books. I will explain their ways and know their values. However, when my ideas cannot adjust ... I will determine according to my vision, with legal certainty ... for God will eternally grant intelligence, (He) will not deny good to those who sincerely follow.⁶

3. Heschel, *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. I, p. iii. (my translation).

4. Compare to S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, E. Urbach, *The Sages*, and M. Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*.

5. *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. I, p. iii.

6. *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. II, p. vii.

As a part of the chain of scriptural exegesis, Heschel bathes himself in the riches of rabbinic *aggadata*, re-assessing and codifying the seldomly handled material. Heschel's "history" is his adoption of the rabbinic legacy, his donning of his predecessors' jewels, not as a donkey burdened with a predetermined load, but as a participant in a process, who is able to uncover uncharted areas within the depths of God's revelation.

How does Heschel understand revelation and, consequently, the nature of Torah? Though his philosophy of Judaism is set forth in many books, articles and addresses,⁷ we will rely on a section from *God in Search of Man* where he describes man's active participation in revelation:

The Bible is not an intellectual sinecure, and its acceptance should not be like setting up a talismanic lock that seals both the mind and the conscience against the intrusion of new thoughts. Revelation is not vicarious thinking. Its purpose is . . . to extend our understanding. The prophets . . . tried to teach us how to think in the categories of God: His holiness, justice and compassion. The appropriation of these categories . . . is a challenge to look for ways of translating Biblical commandments into programs required by our own conditions . . . The word was given once; the effort to understand it must go on forever. It is not enough to accept or even to carry out the commandments. *To study, to examine, to explore the Torah is a form of worship, a supreme duty.*⁸ (my emphasis)

For Heschel, *talmud Torah*, the study of the Torah, is a religious activity of the highest order; it is the essence of life.⁹ The dialogue initiated between God and man at Sinai is to be continued through *talmud Torah*.

Heschel deliberately initiates his discussion of rabbinic theology in *Torah min Hashamayim* within the framework of a discussion of the two ways that this dialogue has been continued in rabbinic exegesis. Two different conceptions of the Biblical text foster divergent interpretive pathways — Is the Torah the embodiment of the Divine and, thus, pregnant with infinite meanings, as Rabbi Akiva urges, or is His message rendered intelligible for purposes of communication, as Rabbi Yishmael argues? Heschel's discussion resonates with the ideas espoused by several twentieth century students of hermeneutics and literary criticism. One such scholar virtually reiterates the essence of Heschel's analysis: "The exegete . . . chooses and creates his methods, although concurrently these methods impose themselves on the exegete: each specific

7. See Arnold Eisen, "Re-reading Heschel on the Commandments," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (February 1989), for a treatment of the scholarship on Heschel's philosophy of religion as well as for an attempt at understanding one aspect of Heschel's theology of modern Judaism.

8. *God in Search of Man*, p. 273.

9. See Heschel's discussion of Rabbi Akiva's perception of *talmud Torah* in *Torah min Hashamayim* (vol. 1, pp. 170-179) as evidence of Heschel's alignment with the Akivan views on this subject, and thus, with the assumptions underlying the supreme value of *talmud Torah*. Note Eisen, pp. 14-15, for a similar reading of Heschel's Akivan stance.

set of methods symbolizes a specific pre-understanding of the text.” A change of method suggests an alternate pre-understanding.¹⁰

The pre-understanding of the Akivan school, which, like Heschel, views the Torah as a mirror of Divine infinitude, and, thus, infinite as well, holds that every letter and mark yields semantic value. Since both form and content are pregnant with meaning, the two become indistinguishable when attempting to unravel the Torah’s infinite layers of meaning.¹¹ Alternatively, the Yishmaelian pre-understanding conceives of the words of the text as vehicles of communication, comprehensible in their singularity of meaning; therefore, Yishmaelian hermeneutics concentrate entirely on understanding the plain meaning of the Torah. Yishmaelian exegesis is functional in that it decodes in order to know how to behave; action — *mizvot* — are the essence of Jewish worship for the Yishmaelian school. Conversely, Akivan exegesis entails an eternal connection with the text, with God, since midrash never exhausts the infinity of significances of the Torah. This explains why *talmud Torah* is connected with the notion of *devekut* (seeking closeness with God) in the Akivan-Heschelian model.¹²

It follows from this, that the substance of what is uncovered, according to the Heschelian-Akivan conceptualization, is less significant than that one be involved in the process of continually uncovering. Akivan-Heschelian hermeneutics takes on an existential dimension which goes beyond the Yishmaelian effort at determining the correct meaning of the text.

To illuminate and further develop this existential aspect, we will turn to what may at first seem an unlikely analogy. Rejecting the validity of Western metaphysical philosophy and epistemology, Martin Heidegger redefined the nature of the knowledge of Being and the meaning of understanding. Knowledge does not consist in correctness and agreement — terms, Heidegger insists, which belong to the sciences and which are misleading when employed in the philosophical quest of understanding Being.

The crucial question regarding being is not merely the nature of being but how to think being and how being comes to appearance; much consideration . . . is given to man’s stance in this hermeneutical event in which being comes to stand . . . Heidegger asserts that man stands in a “hermeneutical relationship” . . . in which he is the message-bringer, the enunciator of being. . . . *True thinking is . . . disclosing what was hidden . . . a thinking dialogue with the text will . . . bring further disclosure . . .* Yet this . . . act of interpretation must continually go back to a loving repetition

10. Daniel Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 3.

11. *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. I, pp. 10-11.

12. *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. I, p. 170. *Talmud Torah* as that which connects one with God emerges out of Heschel’s understanding of the nature of Torah, while the thematic connection of *talmud Torah* and *devekut* is suggested by the appearance of these two sub-chapters under the rubric of “Obligations of the Heart” (vol. I, chapter IX).

of the original disclosure, must keep itself on the border between what is concealed and revealed . . . Questioning, then, is a way that man contends with and draws being into showing itself. It bridges the ontological difference between being and the being of beings.¹³ (my emphasis)

Language, for Heidegger, is not a means of expression but of the appearance of being. In Heidegger's *On Time and Being*, the emphasis placed on the hermeneutical relationship elucidates the preference for the term "Appropriation to Being," for it designates an activity: in the relationship between man and Being "as appropriated to each other, the relation is more fundamental than what is related."¹⁴

In the Heschelian-Akivan model of infinite meaning, man acquires a critical role as the bestower of meaning. This relationship between the text, God, and man, is sharply summed up in a Yishmaelian critique of Akivan exegesis — "for it is as if you are saying to the text: silence until I interpret you"¹⁵ In other words, there is no correct interpretation.¹⁶ The nature of this Akivan stance, this hermeneutical relationship, bridges the gap between God and man. This phenomenon has interesting parallels in certain kabbalistic circles. The kabbalistic blurring of the distinction between infinite God and infinite Torah led to the creation of distinctly mystical hermeneutical methods, exegetical devices, and a theory of language that applied to Biblical interpretation. As with the Akivan school, it was based on the perception of the Bible "as encompassing an infinity of significances . . . "; several of these infinities of the Torah " . . . are consonant with various modern literary theories of writing, reading and/or interpretation."¹⁷ Compare the following with Heidegger's hermeneutical relationship:

The kabbalistic transformation of words and whole sentences into symbols has a deep impact on the perception of language itself. For even as the individual word retains its original forms, even as its place in the sentence or its grammatical function remain stable, its status as a lower projection of the Godhead renders it an absolute entity. The result is a mystical linguistics forged into a skeletal grammar. Rather than being understood as mundane and conventional units of communication or representation, the words of the Bible, grasped as moments of God's enacted autobiography, become instruments for *His self-revelation in being*. (my emphasis)¹⁸

13. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 148-150.

14. Joan Stambaugh, Introduction to Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1972), p. x.

15. *Torah min Hashamayim*, vol. I. p. 9.

16. There is no correct interpretation within the parameters dictated by the acceptance of, and faith in, the Bible and the Prophetic accounts. Eisen addresses the issue of Heschel's methodology with regard to the question of truth — "is it true?" *Op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

17. Moshe Idel, "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah," in *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 145.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

The common pre-understanding of the text provides the point of departure for the kabbalist *and* the Akivan exegete.¹⁹ This “pneumatic” exegesis, a hermeneutics which allows for the discovery of infinite significance within the Bible, coexists with “... a virtual closure of the gap between God, interpreter and Torah.”²⁰

Heschel tells us that the Akivan exegetical model captured the hearts and imaginations of our Rabbis. While it may seem strange to claim that the more mystical conception of the Torah triumphed, a quick perusal of contemporary essays defining midrash would seem to support Heschel’s assertion.²¹ New meanings are continually discovered through re-interpretation, while the attitude is maintained that one is really only discovering further depths within the revealed tradition. The adoption by the Rabbis of the Akivan exegetical model has molded our definition of legitimate, true Jewish exegesis, in the Heideggerian sense of true thinking; Heschel re-inforces this notion by doing his midrash on the history of rabbinic theology.

The nature of the assignment suggests a certain role for Heschel, as author. Ostensibly, he was not setting out to write a personal religious philosophy or theology. Compared with his other writings, here his own voice is overtly only minimally heard. The volumes are constructed out of the threading together of *aggadot*, with Heschel’s comments peppered throughout in short, suggestive sentences rather than in lengthy essays which stand independent of the midrashic material. Heschel’s rabbinic Hebrew and style, his short midrashic compositions, blend into the larger patchwork of rabbinic *aggadot* and *midrashim*. Both in word choice and in style, Heschel’s voice becomes barely distinguishable from the midrashic texts.

19. Idel contrasts kabbalist hermeneutics with rabbinic midrash. The midrashic view, according to Idel, scrupulously preserves the distances between God, the interpreter, and the Torah (p. 141). Heschel identifies an alternate strand of hermeneutics within rabbinic literature, the Akivan model, which, though not identical to the kabbalists in its entirety, shares its more mystical view of the vertical link between man and God, man and the Torah. I do not wish to conflate the two. Rather, the comparison helps to elucidate the nature of the Akivan-Heschelian model.

20. Idel, “Infinites of Torah ...”, p. 141.

21. For a couple of examples, see Hartman’s “The Struggle for the Text,” Heinemann’s “The Nature of Aggadah,” and Roitman’s “Sacred Language and Open Text,” in *Midrash and Literature*. Midrash consists of an eternal dialectic between the authoritative text and the creative interpreter:

Judaism has sought to dignify the status of religious commentary, and in one popular mythic image transferred it to a metaphysical dimension. For the well-known Talmudic image of God studying and interpreting His own Torah is nothing if not that tradition’s realization that there is no authoritative teaching which is not also the source of its own renewal, that revealed teachings are a dead letter unless revitalized in the mouth of those who study them.

(Michael Fishbane, in “Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel,” in *Midrash and Literature*, p. 19).

Disparate *midrashim* are welded together by the sometimes invisible hand of our author into paragraphs and chapters that are thematically organized. He gathers *midrashim* from different compilations and tracts, and relocates them according to their subject matter and authorship. Within each chapter, whether "Theodicy," "Repentance" or "Mitzvah and Intention," Heschel delineates the heirs of the schools of Akiva and Yishmael throughout the centuries of the rabbinic period. Unattributed *midrashim* are attributed to one of the two schools, independent of any concrete evidence linking the particular rabbi to a certain mentor. For Heschel, one is a student of the Yishmael school if one reflects Yishmaelian thinking. Every student and every midrash, therefore, is catalogued and shelved in Heschel's system.

This attempt to ascertain the authorship of a saying is quintessentially rabbinic. The *Amoraim* (3rd to 6th century rabbinic explicators of the earlier legal pronouncements of the *Tannaim*) often begin their discussion of a *Tannaitic* text, a *Mishnah* or a *Baraita*, with the question of authorship: "To whom does this statement belong?" Reluctant to leave a source unattributed, they search for its sponsor. The search becomes an end in itself — the fulfillment of the commandment of *talmud Torah*.

To the modern critic, Heschel's magnificent effort at rendering hundreds of years of rabbinic theology into two neat polarities seems jarringly simplistic. Just as the *Amoraim* often claimed that a certain sage was the author of a given statement based upon calculations of content, not concerned with, and certainly not schooled in, the guidelines set by modern historical method for the postulation of authorship, so does Heschel. Traditional rabbinic materials such as the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* are constructed in dichotomous sections — dichotomies of Rabbi (R. Judah, the Prince) and *hahamim* (the anonymous "Sages") or *resha* and *sefa* (the first and latter parts of a *Tannaitic* text). The setting up of these structures provided the later generations of rabbis with material for inquiry — "What does the *sefa* add to the *resha*?" "If the *resha* says such and such, what does that do to our understanding of the *sefa*?" "Do we learn this from the *resha* or the *sefa*?" Heschel also writes in the form of short *sugyot* (Talmudic discussions of a problem), many of the subchapters being no more than a page, with paragraphs that are often a line, and, in the language of his rabbinic predecessors, he employs their structural approach both as his fulfillment of the commandment to study Torah and as an effort to ensure the continuation of *talmud Torah*. As we read what is, in effect, a new rabbinic midrashic compilation, we are forced to interpret Heschel's text, to see if it works, what the connections are between the *sugyot*, and what to do with contradictions and misnomers, by rereading rabbinic *midrashim* — our rabbinic heritage — in their new context.

By pulling traditional *midrashim* to the fore in a new context, Hes-

chel allows for the continuation of Jewish exegesis. Future exegetes can continue to unravel the infinite significances of the Torah now through the additional midrashic compilation of Heschel. They can deconstruct and restructure Heschel's dualistic structure. Indeed, Heschel's intentional simplification of the material into two independent strands may be the signal calling for its reworking and re-interpretation by later generations.

One is not to walk away from Heschel's *Torah min Hashamayim* with the definitive word on rabbinic theology.²² Actually, by constructing what may be a fragile dichotomy, Heschel plants the seeds within his work for, at the very least, its partial undermining. As Heschel noted with respect to the Kotsker Rebbe's question — the meaning of the Torah can never be fully and permanently captured by the written word.

22. Consider as well the significance of the Hebrew title, *Torah min Hashamayim*, emphasizing revelation, Torah, as opposed to the titles of the various other studies of rabbinic theology (footnote 4). The title, mis-translated into English — *Theology of Ancient Judaism* — suggests erroneously that Heschel's work belongs to the latter category of rabbinic scholarly anthologies. As efforts at translation are under way, one may consider whether such a work can indeed be translated from rabbinic Hebrew into English without changing the essential nature of the work. One can read Heschel's volumes on *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, but can one thereby be engaged in *talmud Torah*?

Homosexuality and the Order of Creation

SAMUEL H. DRESNER

You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt or the land of Canaan: Do not have carnal relations with your mother, your daughter, your sister, with a beast, with one of your own sex. It is an abomination. Do not sacrifice your child to Molekh. It is an abomination. Let not the land vomit you forth for defiling it, as it vomited forth the nation that came before you. (Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20)

HOMOSEXUALITY IS A VIOLATION OF THE order of Creation.

In the passage cited above, the Bible forbids homosexuality, and other illicit sexual expressions, because it affirms heterosexuality as the way in which humans were made and intended to behave. This affirmation is laid out in the first chapters of Genesis.

Male and female He created Them (1:27). In taking up the emergence of the human species, heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation.

It is not good for man to be alone (2:18). Man is in need of a companion. Who will it be? First the animals are considered. Man *names* them, that is, he understands their nature and comprehends why none is a fitting mate for him. Here we have an implicit rejection of bestiality. Woman is formed and becomes his partner. In her, man finds completion. So the Sages instruct that a woman should not be without a husband; a man should not be without a wife; and both should not be without the Divine Presence.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (1:28). Replenishment of mankind through propagation and companionship are the purposes of heterosexuality.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-24). The husband-wife relationship is axiological. It takes precedence even over the elemental parent-child bond.

Male and female He created them and called their name adam (5:2). The name “adam,” which here means a human person, is given to the man and woman together and not separately. In other words, we are only fully human, fully *adam*, when male and female are met in a social bonding, in marriage. Therefore, it follows that the blessing, “Praised are You, O Lord . . . Creator of *adam*,” is not recited at birth, as one might expect, but at the Jewish wedding service, when male and female are joined, and the intention of creation is biologically completed.

The early Biblical narratives can be read as a continuous attack on the widespread sexual deviance which challenged and often seduced the

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Israelites, whose fallings away Scripture scrupulously records. Thus, arguments are advanced against bestiality, in the story of Adam naming the animals (as we have noted); against homosexuality, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (from which tale derive the pejoratives “sodomy” and “sodomites”); against voyeurism at least and homosexuality at worst, in the case of Noah and his sons; against incest, in the incident of Lot and his daughters; and against rape, in the Dinah episode.

What has not been sufficiently noted, however, is that the principal story of this type, one which includes all forms of sexual deviance, including homosexuality, is the flood, a catastrophe which far outreached other stories limited to family or community.¹ What crime was of such magnitude to have evoked a divine regret over the creation of humankind and require the destruction of almost every living creature? According to the most ancient understanding of the Biblical story found in rabbinic sources, it was the violation of the natural order of sexual life. Sexual deviance was so pervasive and so struck at the heart of God’s plan for the world, that a reconstitution of that order could only come from a new creation. But how do we know that the cause of the deluge had to do with the corruption of the sexual order, since Scripture only tells us that its justification was *man’s wickedness* but not what this “wickedness” was? Let us examine the text.

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them . . . The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth and . . . said “I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created” . . . (Gen: 6:1-2, 5-7)

The episode of the flood is introduced with the story of the seizing of human women by heavenly creatures. *The divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took . . . from among those that pleased them* (6:2). This enigmatic tale of *divine beings* has puzzled Biblical scholars, who usually understand it as a remnant of the pagan mythology of the life of the gods, which somehow escaped the eye of the Biblical censor and found its way into the canon. That may very well be, but, whatever its source, it would seem to be used here to explain the origins of the catastrophe of the deluge. It suggests that the immoral life of the gods was aped by humans, the disastrous effect of which was of such measure that it called into question God’s plan for creation. By transgressing the bounds of nature, the performance of the *divine beings*, Nahum Sarna observes, signals the calamitous breakdown of the Biblical “world order.”²

1. See Jack. L. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood (in Jewish) and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) for a survey of Jewish and Christian understandings of the flood.

2. N. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), p. 145. One midrash suggests that these

The Jewish Sages clearly understood the story as a polemic against the dissolute ways of the pagan gods and pagan society. They ascribed to the “divine beings” the most lurid sexual crimes: the rape of virgins before marriage (*jus primus noctis*), the rape of women already married, and copulation with other males and beasts.³ If lust invaded heavenly creatures, what cravings must humans have suffered? For *the Lord saw how great was the wickedness of man on earth* (6:5).

While other crimes are listed among the catalogue of misdemeanors of the generation of the deluge, the rabbinic understanding of the flood story affirms that their *wickedness* was primarily sexual. The key verse is *All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth* (Gen. 6:12).

“Flesh” corrupting its “way” is taken in a sexual sense. Examples that are cited are whoredom,⁴ incest⁵ and sodomy.⁶ Reflecting the custom common among the Greeks,

[t]he men of the generation of the flood used to take two wives, one for procreation and the other for sexual gratification. The former would stay like a widow throughout her life, while the latter was given to drink a potion of roots, so that she should not bear, and then she sat before him like a harlot.⁷

“All” *flesh*, including the beast. The natural barriers of sexual distinction had broken down, also those separating man from the brute creation, so that all were now on the same level.

On the “earth,” even the order of the plant kingdom was corrupted. The rabbis describe the perverse condition thus:

While humans manipulated the coupling of wild beasts with the domesticated cattle, they themselves copulated with both . . . ; [even] the earth yielded unnaturally [“went a-whoring”] . . . Each of these [mismatches] returned to their proper species [as a result of the ordeal of the flood].⁸

The generation of the flood was not blotted out from the world, until they took to composing nuptial songs for marriages between man and man and man and beast as for man and woman.⁹

God is long-suffering of all manner of crime, save sexual immorality. [Two examples are given: the flood, and the case of Sodom, where Lot’s prayers delayed the punishment of the Sodomites, until they made their homosexual desires known, “Bring them out that they we may have intercourse with them” (29:5), after which Lot and his family are told to flee for their lives from the destruction which then swiftly follows.]¹⁰

angels belittled the carnal temptation, and said that were they to descend to earth, they would remain immune. They descended, and succumbed. (M. Kasher, *Torah Shleimah*, vol. II, p. 371, no. 16).

3. *Genesis Rabbah*, 26:5. See Theodor-Albeck, ed., note to this verse.

4. *Leviticus Rabbah* 23:9.

5. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

6. B. *Sanhedrin* 108a; *Genesis Rabbah* 27:3.

7. *Genesis Rabbah* 23:2.

8. B. *Sanhedrin* 108a.

9. *Leviticus Rabbah* 23:9; *Genesis Rabbah* 26:5.

10. *Genesis Rabbah* 26:5; cf. *Tanhuma*, Genesis 12; *Leviticus Rabbah* 23:9.

So appalling were the sins of the generation of the flood, according to the rabbis, that the Divine Presence which had come to dwell among men fled heavenward, while the sublime light that God had made on the first day of creation was secreted in the World to Come, in which those who perished in the flood would have no share, nor be judged, nor be mourned for by the angels who sang even at the drowning of the wicked Egyptians.¹¹

What may have begun as a pagan cultic crossbreeding to encourage fertility,¹² exploded into a fury of sexual license that shattered the most ancient, guarded and fundamental of barriers. The normal pattern of copulating had broken down, from humans engaging in random coupling, to cross-breeding within the animal kingdom, to the joining of man and beast, as woman had been joined with divine beings (Gen. 6:1-4). Thus, the flood was caused, say the Sages, by violation of the laws of natural mating through all branches of creation. Only the most drastic measure might save the human experiment: destruction and a new beginning — but a beginning which would be centered upon the sexual paradigm of husband and wife.

A careful analysis of the story of the flood bears out this focus upon sexual order and disorder. Scripture takes pains to tell us that of those who entered the ark each male had a female companion: Noah and his sons are never mentioned entering or exiting from the ark except with their wives (6:18, 7:7,13, 8:16,18). This fivefold repetition is emphatic. A further examination of these texts reveals that husbands and wives are listed separately upon entering but together upon leaving, which leads the Sages to conclude that sexual relations were not permitted in the ark, the better, perhaps, to dwell upon the cause of the flood which lead to their incarceration and salvation.¹³

This focus upon the sexual order points to the family. Continuation of human life was threatened by the quality of that life. Promiscuous sexual relations between man and man, man and woman, human and beast, would inevitably cripple the institution of the human couple and that of the human family. Therefore, when humans are chosen to repopulate the world, it is not simply a group of men and women who are designated, but a *family*. Not Noah and “others,” but Noah with his “wife,” and their sons with their “wives” — which is to say, an entire family unit. So firmly is this teaching embedded in the flood story, that *every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark “by families”* (8:19).

11. *Genesis Rabbah* 19:7; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:1; B. *Hagigah* 12a; *Ruth Rabbah* intr. 7:5; *Exodus Rabbah* 35:1; *Genesis* 28:8; B. *Sanhedrin* 108a; *Lamentations Rabbah* introd. 24.

12. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Mixed Species,” esp. references to Maimonides and Nahmanides.

13. *Genesis Rabbah* 31:12;34:7. Cf. Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones* on *Genesis* 2:49.

Nor must the monogamous element be overlooked. Noah and his sons each have a single wife. Their children are born from these wives and not from additional wives or maidservants. In this, the pattern of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is replicated. The message seems clear: human society is meant to be composed of families, of monogamous families.

Further, and quite remarkably, this concern to restore sexual normality to humans through the pairing of Noah and his children into husbands and wives, was extended even to the animals. They, too, are brought to the ark *male and female* and each according to *its species* (6:20, 7:14), to reconstitute them into their proper groupings, just like the humans. Most curious is the fact that the animals, upon entering the ark, are not simply described as *male and female* and according to their *species*, but *each with his wife* (7:20)¹⁴ (the only such usage in Scripture) and, upon exiting, as we have noted, according to their *families*! These last delineations are taken by the Sages to mean that the only animals allowed in the ark to constitute the new society and re-establish sexual order were those who had not violated their “species” in the past, and only those were allowed out who promised not to do so in the future.¹⁵

In the Genesis story, the crossbreeding between “heavenly” males and earthly women prepares the way for the destruction of the flood. According to the Sages, generative crossing-over was the paradigm for the subsequent mixing of sexual lines among humans, among animals, and between them both, a transgression which extended upward to include divine beings and humans, and downward to encompass even the plant kingdom. The disarray was so complete and so total as to embrace the supernal, the biological and botanical realms. Corruption of the intended order of creation, we are told, had insinuated itself into the very first generations of humans to such chaos as to prove intolerable to the divine will. Catastrophe and a new creation were called for — the flood! The deluge swept away both man and beast, leaving only the inhabitants of a small ship to restore order for the new world that would emerge. Divine mis-mating had been joined with that of the human, animal and plant worlds to shatter the harmony of the universe.

What lies behind the drama of the flood, if this supposition is correct, is the avowal that sexual misconduct may open the floodgates of destruction. There comes a time when society can no longer abide the violation of the laws which bind it together; a point is reached when constant batterings finally unravel the cords, and every thing falls to pieces. For it was because sexually forbidden restraints were abandoned, we are told, that a global convulsion of enormous proportions took place. Scripture spells out the dynamics of that deluge in Leviticus 18 and 20 (which I have cited

14. The *Targum* resolves the difficulty by translating the phrase, *male and female*, as in 7:3. Cf. Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, III 6.

15. Rashi, *ad. loc.*.

above), where a cataclysm of smaller proportions transpires. There, the Israelites are warned that just as *the land vomited forth* the Canaanites for their sexual debauchery and child sacrifice, and replaced them with the Israelites, so will it treat the Israelites themselves should they so behave. Note that Scripture takes care to tell us that it is the “land” which becomes defiled through such behavior, and the “land” which has “vomited forth” its inhabitants (and may do so again). Divine compassion accounts for human frailty, but the moral law is so set into the very fabric of creation, that, when the measure of toleration is exceeded, it spews forth sinners, whether pagan or Hebrew.

The Bible and the Talmud are replete with the requirements, admonitions and prohibitions set down to encourage the sexual morality expected of the post-flood humanity, with only mixed success. One series of laws which may relate to the flood, found in the holiness chapter of the Bible and carried further in an entire tractate of the Talmud, is that forbidding a “mixing of kinds:” *You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material* (Leviticus 19:19). Could this admonition be a reflection of the rabbinic opinion that the crossbreeding which they claim brought about the deluge had reached to the very plant kingdom? To this very day, pious Jews are careful in not wearing clothing in which wool and linen are mixed (*sha’atnez*), as proscribed in Lev. 19:19, though few can offer a rationale. Maimonides, however, records a striking middle-eastern practice consistent with the connection of magic, mingling of diverse species, and immorality.

[The Sabians] mention that when one species is grafted upon another, the bough that is meant to be grafted ought to be held in the hand of a beautiful girl and of a man who has come into her in a disgraceful manner that they describe, and that the woman must graft the bough upon the tree while the two are performing this act. There is no doubt that this practice was generally adopted . . . especially in view of the fact that in this custom pleasure of sexual intercourse is joined to the desire for the benefits in question. Therefore the *mingling* [of diverse species] . . . is forbidden, so that we shall keep far away from the causes of idolatry and from the abomination of their unnatural kinds of sexual intercourse.¹⁶

Despite the havoc wrought by the flood, Scripture sees it as only an interlude in the moral chaos that prevailed in the ten generations that preceded it and the ten that followed, until the advent of Abraham and Sarah. The patriarchs and matriarchs, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, reminiscent of Adam and Eve, attempt to replicate

16. Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, III 37. In the same section, Maimonides notes that “most of these magical practices [found in the Middle East] pose the condition that those who perform them should necessarily be women They mention [for example] that if four women lie down upon their backs, raise their legs, holding them apart, and say and do certain things while in this disgraceful posture, hail will cease falling in that place”

within the mortal and fallible portals of history the monogamous model of the Garden of Eden. With the patriarch-matriarch paradigm, the Bible establishes the human couple as the fulfillment of the order of creation and the archetype for all generations. Their mode is refuted neither by the concubines, who are only brought to Abraham and Jacob by the barren matriarchs, that they may raise the children, nor by Leah, whose position is anomalous and incongruous, a foil for monogamy.¹⁷ It is the institution of marriage and the consequent features of the family — home, permanence, fidelity, and mutuality — which become the national treasure of the Jewish people, the bulwark and irreplaceable center of their society, and which Judaism surrounds with all manner of support and protection. The home which housed the Jewish family became both a school of parental instruction and a sanctuary-in-miniature (as the Talmud calls it), where the family rites were enacted. One needs only to compare the two home occasions, the Jewish Sabbath table with its family presence, its traditions and its religious joy, with the common form of the Greek symposium from which the excluded family was replaced by drink, conversation and sexual liaison with prostitutes or young boys.

Both the Greeks and the Jews possess myths which explain love as the reconstitution of two creatures into their pre-existent unity. One is found in Plato's Symposium, the other in the classic work of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar. The contrast between them, however, is conclusive. In the Symposium, Aristophanes cites the celebrated fable of immensely proportioned pre-existent humans with two heads, four arms, etc., whom Zeus severs in two in a moment of anger, pulls their skins together and sets them free in the world. Ever after they are destined to seek their other half: those who were androgynous searching for one of the opposite sex, while those who were of a single sex, whether male or female, searching for a same-sex mate.

The Zohar presents a counter-myth of reunification.¹⁸ According to its account, human creation was of a single person with two faces. "God sawed [it] in two, separating the female from the male and brought them together, so they would be face to face. And when she was gathered in to man, then God blessed them, as at the wedding service." Note the two differences in this version from that of the Greek legend: first, the pre-existent state is only androgynous and never all-male or all-female, thus rejecting the homosexual option; and, second, the reconstitution of the primeval unity is not simply the working of biological tropism, the blind yearning for another body, as the Greek myth would have it, but the solemn union of husband and wife. The Zohar's fable finds its source, of course, in the Biblical story of creation: *Male and female He made them* [an-

17. Leah was more a foil for monogamy than a case of polygamy. See the chapter on Leah in my forthcoming book on Rachel.

18. *Zohar* III 4b. This is based on numerous earlier rabbinic passages. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. V, pp. 88-9, for sources and comparisons.

drogyny]. *He blessed them, and called "their" name adam* [marriage] (5:2). It is here argued that only in the male/female relationship are we fully human beings; that only then is adam, the human person, fully created,¹⁹ and that the male/female relationship is sanctified in the institution of marriage. Until marriage, the individual is said to be incomplete, unfulfilled. As the Zohar puts it, "The Divine Presence rests only upon a married man, because an unmarried man is but half a man, and the Divine Presence does not rest upon that which is imperfect."²⁰ Similarly, the Talmud, "Whoever is not married is without joy, blessing or good, [and some add] without Torah or peace."²¹ Indeed, so important was it to establish marriage as the norm, that the Midrash suggests that God Himself performed the first wedding ceremony for Adam and Eve.

Few *mizvot* are so richly developed in Jewish literature and Jewish life as marriage. A good part of the Talmud deals with its wider ramifications. The Bible already exempted a male from army service, in the first year of marriage, that he might *rejoice with his wife* (Deut. 24:5). At the circumcision, the prayer is recited, "As he has entered the covenant of Abraham, so may he enter the study of Torah, the marital state and the practice of good deeds." It was considered a parental duty to arrange for an early marriage for children. "One who reaches the age of twenty and has not yet married," warns the Talmud, . . . "spends all his days with sinful thoughts."²² Indeed, to protect the holiness of Jerusalem from being contaminated by the presence of unmarried men, those between the ages of 20 and 60 were forbidden to reside there, according to an ordinance of 1749.²³ Hesitant young men might be compelled by the Jewish court to marry.²⁴ Social pressure was exerted in a variety of ways. For example, an unmarried man does not wear a *talit* or a *kittel* in the synagogue, nor does an unmarried woman cover her hair, by which habits their marital status is clearly identified. Sephardim (those who follow the Spanish rite) call a married man to the public reading of the Torah as *gevir* or "gentleman;" otherwise he is merely *bahur* or "young man/bachelor." In the competitive list of those who had priority rights to the honor of being called to the reading of the Torah, the bridegroom stood first. The most precious of Jewish possessions, the Torah scroll, cannot be sold, except to pay for a wedding. Jewish society was so structured as to encourage, arrange, and maintain marriage, and, in the event of death, remarriage. In the writings of Church Fathers, on the other hand, not only was cel-

19. "A man without a wife is not a man, for it is said, '*male and female He created them. He blessed them and called their name adam*' (5:2)." B. *Yevamot* 63a.

20. *Zohar Hadash* 4,50b.

21. B. *Yevamot* 62b, *Genesis Rabbah* 17:2

22. B. *Kiddushin* 29b, 30b.

23. D. Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1968), p. 31, n. 53.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

ibacy preferred to marriage, but once married, if one's spouse died, widowhood was the chosen state.²⁵

An unspoken principle in Jewish life emerged quite early: whatever strengthened the family is to be affirmed, whatever hinders it is to be opposed.

What the doctrine of creation was to the Hebrews, "natural law" was to the Greeks. While popular practice, exemplified by Aristophanes' myth of the divided human searching for his other half, be it male or female, reflected the wide acceptance of homosexuality during certain periods, the philosophic-legal opinion was quite different. Aristophanes' myth, after all, was spoken in the give-and-take of dialogue, and need not represent Plato's view, which, following Aristotle, finds that homosexuality is "unnatural."²⁶ The Greek thinkers understood certain features to be characteristic of man "by nature," while others are not. Recent scholars, some of whom have their own private sexual agendas, have bridled at Plato's terminology, and try to soften it. Thus, in the *Republic* (571b), Plato speaks of dreams in which one,

as if freed from every restraint of shame and reason, attempt[s] to have intercourse with his mother or with any other creature, human or divine or animal . . . and in a word to go to any length in madness and shamelessness.

The translation of Plato's terms for such longings, *paranomoi*, clearly means "against *nomos* or law," and not simply "convention," as one recent author would have it.²⁷ Thus, Herodotus (i.61) speaks of one who, wishing to have no children by his new wife, had intercourse with her in a way which was not in accordance with *nomos*. Furthermore, in Plato's *Laws* we find:

Were one [legislator] to follow the guidance of nature and adopt the law of the old days before Laius — I mean, to pronounce it wrong to have to do carnally with youthful male as with female, and to fetch his evidence from the life of animals, pointing out that male does not touch male in this way because the action is unnatural [not by *physis*], his contention would surely be a telling one, yet it would be quite at variance with the practice of your societies.²⁸

The example of animal behavior cited in this passage hardly lends itself to explanation as a violation of "convention," but quite decisively describes homosexuality as unnatural, yet widely practiced — precisely the Greek conundrum.

25. D. Bailey, *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959), pp. 20, 31-2, quoted by Feldman, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

26. Plato, *Laws*, Bk. 8, 835d-842a, especially 836d, 838b,c. Cf. Jasper Griffin, *NY Review of Books*, March 29, 1990, p. 10.

27. John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Cf. Griffin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

28. Plato's *Laws*, translated by A.E. Taylor (The Everyman Series, Dutton, 1934), p. 223, quoted by Griffin, *Op. cit.*, p. 9. See ahead for further explanation of Laius.

This conundrum is expressed, on the one hand, in the spread of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. Thus, one scholar describes Periclean Athens as “a society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to the male genitalia, have sex with sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, and create a mythology of rape;”²⁹ while another authority sees the later Greco-Roman society as exhibiting “all the symptoms of a great national disease, a kind of moral pestilence . . . In every truth, the whole of society was infected with it, and people inhaled the pestilence with the air they breathed . . . By time the last days of the free republic were reached, the vice had attained a fearful degree among the Romans.”³⁰

On the other hand, the reference above to the time of the early king, Laius, as the watershed of homosexuality in Greece, suggests a more complex attitude to homosexuality there. We are, of course, familiar with the centerpiece of Freud’s theory of the parent-child relationship, the Oedipus complex, in which the killing of one’s father to marry one’s mother is paradigmatic. Oedipus is the famed character in Sophocles’ play of the same name, where the story is played out to a horrified audience which witnesses the killing of his father, king Laius, and the marrying of his mother in ignorance of her true identity. Less well-known is the mythic origin of the story. For, according to a legend, homosexuality was unaccustomed in Greece before the time of king Laius, the father of Oedipus. The tale goes that a boy, whom Laius had abducted for sexual purposes, committed suicide out of shame, whereupon the boy’s father placed a curse upon the king: either that he should have no son or that this son would kill his father. The myth adds that Hera, the goddess of marriage, fearing that homosexuality would undermine her dominion, sent the Sphinx to destroy Thebes, the city of Laius. Thus, the story of Oedipus, the classic tale of family tragedy in Greek drama, has its source in the spread of homosexuality, whose introduction into Greek life was understood to have brought on a familial catastrophe, personal and communal, which, though smaller in scale, has its parallel to the flood myth among the Hebrews that some explain as the result of sexual confusion.³¹

Heterosexuality, is, then, for the Greeks — at least, theoretically and legally — a human characteristic “by nature” — as it is for the Hebrews, who would argue the same for the family, which is established and nurtured by marital sexual union. (By marriage is meant a socially recognized and lasting male-female cohabitation.)

The debate over the argument from normality is illustrated by Roger

29. Eva Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 267,8.

30. Jack Lindsay, *The Ancient World: Manners and Morals*, p. 54.

31. Griffin, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

Scruton's amusing parable of the lion without a mane. It seems that a plague struck and had left lions without manes. Soon, two opinions formed. One argued the obvious: that while lions may not have manes for the time being as the result of a plague, the real lion, the normal lion, the one intended by the order of creation or nature, of course, has a mane, while those presently without them are deviants. The other replied with equal aplomb, that today's modern maneless lions are quite happy as they are, delighted to be rid of those mangy manes. And all this talk about plagues, creation, natural law and normality is sheer nonsense, an insidious effort to pull us back into the past.³²

Nevertheless, homosexuality is abnormal in the sense that it violates the natural constitution of humans. Even if it is no fault of their own, one can say that homosexuals are abnormal in the same way that the blind and the deaf are abnormal. As the existence of such persons does not deny the fact that humans hear and see "by nature," so humans are heterosexual "by nature," though individual persons may be homosexual, whether by constitutional orientation or environmental influence. Whether one views marriage as a part of the divine order of creation or of natural law, one who is unable to enter into such a sexual relationship is abnormal.

Certainly, for the preponderance of homosexuals today, those "by choice," Jaffa's observation applies: "All normal people have within themselves, at one time or another, desires which they know they ought not to gratify. The difference — by and large — between those who live moral and those who live immoral lives, is that the former refuse to indulge their passions merely because they have them. By habitually doing what is right, and habitually abstaining from what is wrong, the bad passions gradually lose their power, and the good ones become increasingly pleasant. This is what moral education is all about."³³

"Why," continues Jaffa, "is sodomy against the natural law? . . . Because man is a species-being and the species which defines his nature is both rational and social . . . The inclination of many men . . . to take their sex where they find it (whether their partners consent to it or not) and ignore the consequences, must be subordinated to their higher nature, which includes the interest of society. For in no other species are the young so helplessly dependent for so long. Hence the importance . . . of both the moral and civil laws governing the institution of marriage and of the family. We know that the relaxation of these laws leads to disorder, disease, and death, no less surely in the most advanced cultures of modernity than in the most primitive . . . All friendship, all society, indeed, all of human existence, arises from the physical difference of male and female human beings. From this physical difference arises the ground and

32. Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Richard Neuhaus, "The Maneless Lions," *National Review*, May 8, 1987: 5.

33. Harry V. Jaffa, *Homosexuality and the Natural Law* (Montclair, CA: The Claremont Institute), p. 25.

purpose of human life, because it is the ground and purpose of nature . . . Equally with rape and incest, homosexuality strikes at the authority and dignity of the family. The distinction between a man and a woman is a distinction as fundamental as any in nature, because it is the very distinction by which nature itself is constituted. It is the ability of two members of the same species to generate a third, that confirms them as members of the same species. It thereby confirms male and female members of the human species in that equality of rights to which they are entitled as members of that species.

“ . . . A wife does not expect to be in sexual competition with other women, and a husband does not expect to be in such competition with other men. Nor does a wife expect to be in sexual competition with other men, or a man with other women. Where such competition exists, there can be no confidence and no love; in short, no family. Nor — odious as it is to say — does a wife expect to be in competition with her daughter, or a husband with his son. Sexual competition, whether from without or from within the family, destroys the friendship between man and wife, and thereby destroys the basis of all other forms of friendship. Confining sexual friendship to its proper sphere — between man and wife — is the very core of that morality by which civilization is constituted. It did not require Freud to instruct us in the fact that the sexual passion in its primal force is anarchic, and that the ‘discontents’ of civilization may be traced to its imperfect sublimation. Nevertheless, without the control of the libido by the super ego, all the interests of civilized existence are at risk.”³⁴

When the Bible associates homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20 with other sexual deviations, it assumes that the heterosexual marital state is the normal condition for sexual relations. Once the argument from the order of creation and natural law is abandoned and heterosexuality within the marital bond as a norm is dismissed, then how can adultery, pedophilia, incest or bestiality be rejected? I have not been able to find a single argument in opposition to, for example, incest, in the literature which advocates homosexuality. The reason for this is the simple fact that “someone who cannot say that sodomy is unnatural cannot say that incest is unnatural.”³⁵ After all, if pleasure is the measure of all things, sexual pleasure the measure of all pleasures, and deferred sexual pleasure the ultimate sin — and unhealthy to boot — then how object to any means to achieve it, including the above itinerary?

To say that bestiality, pedophilia, sado-masochism, fetishism, necrophilia, and homosexuality are perversions, is to posit a norm from which these deviate. But this is precisely what is denied by present-day sexual nihilists. For them there are no norms. Yet none of our contemporary sexual expressions are new to history. Over the centuries, peoples have suf-

34. Jaffa, pp. 33-37.

35. Jaffa, p. 34.

ferred the full measure of sexual experimentation and have testified against them, sometimes going so far as to mete out the death penalty when social cohesion was in jeopardy. The most fundamental code of even primitive societies included, at the very least, rules about the improper uses of force and sex. When, through civil edict, religious instruction and family sanction, sexual codes developed and were progressively internalized — though regularly violated — it was a sign of advancing culture. That culture, the “funded wisdom of the ages,” is grounded in traditional family values, which modern society, in its attempt to turn civilization back to zero, neglects at its peril.

“[A]t the root of the disability of the contemporary American family is the ethic that says that sexual preference is, and should be, only a matter of personal preference and personal choice. The traditional family, the embodiment and expression of ‘the laws of nature and nature’s God,’ as the foundation of a free society, has become merely one of many ‘alternative lifestyles.’ . . . A free people who succumbs to such a teaching cannot long endure.”³⁶

36. Jaffa, p. 38.

Akedah Revisted

NAOMI GRAETZ

*Choose! Bekhor**

Why?

*I am what I am!*¹

You are what you are!

Why choose?

I have put before you

Life and Death,

Blessing and Curse.

Choose Life —

*If you and your offspring would live.*²

One for Life.

One for Death.

My sons! I can not.

The knife, the Agony.

The pain, again

To choose.

Father? God? Son?

I lived. Why?

To choose!

No!

You must!

It is not choice if I must.

To choose is to die.

Two nations are in [her] womb.

Two separate peoples . . .

One people shall be mightier than the other.

*And the older shall serve the younger.*³

* In Hebrew, *behor* is to choose; *bekhor* is the elder.

Different roots and sounds, yet . . .

NAOMI GRAETZ is on the faculty of Ben Gurion University. This poem was written just before her son was inducted into the Israeli Defense Forces.

It is not the practice in our place
To prefer the younger over the elder.⁴

*Give up one.
Divide your heart.*

This is my son, the live one.
I am he.
Or am I the dead one —
Lost, abandoned,
On the altar,
On the way to the knife.

*A sword was brought before him.
To cut the live child in two.⁵
One shall rule.*

No!
I shall choose love.

Let it be.
Give the live child to her.

*There will be no glory for you
That the choice will be
In the hands of a woman.⁶*

Do not put him to death.
She is his mother.⁷

Choose well my dear.
There are no returns
When destiny means choice.
Send him off if you can.

My son, our sons.

Echoes

1. Exodus 3:14
2. Deut. 30:19
3. Gen. 25:22-23
4. Gen. 29:26
5. I Kings 3:22-26
6. Judges 4:9
7. I Kings 3:27

The Bridegroom of Blood: A New Reading

PAMELA TAMARKIN REIS

THERE ARE FEW PASSAGES IN SCRIPTURE more initially mysterious than Exodus 4:24-26. In just three verses, verses that seem to move all the more rapidly because of the eight active verbs that they contain, God encounters Moses and seeks to kill him, Zipporah circumcises either their son or Moses (the subject of the pronouns is unclear) and calls someone a "bridegroom of blood," God withdraws, and Zipporah once again repeats the "bridegroom of blood" epithet. The incident is obviously problematic. How had God sought to kill Moses? Did Moses suddenly become deathly ill, or did he have only a presentiment of doom? Why should God want to kill Moses at all? God has just commanded him to go to Egypt and free the Israelites, has promised to be with him, and Moses is on his way. What makes Zipporah, a Midianite woman, think that by performing the Hebrew rite of circumcision she will save Moses' life? And what does "bridegroom of blood" mean?

Traditional and modern exegetes have tried to answer these questions. The traditional interpretation holds that Moses had neglected to circumcise his son or had put off the circumcision because of concern that in a weakened condition his newborn son would not be able to withstand the stress of the journey. God seeks to kill Moses because of his failure to perform the commandment. Some suggest that it is Moses himself who was circumcised by Zipporah, and that her son is designated euphemistically to preserve Moses' modesty. In either case, the circumcision is life-saving, and the incident teaches the supreme importance of the commandment.

Unfortunately, this explanation raises as many questions as it answers. If Moses or his older son are uncircumcised, surely God knows this when He sends Moses on his mission. Why, therefore, would he send him only to kill him? If Moses' younger son is born after God's call to Moses, and his circumcision is postponed because of the journey, how can that be displeasing to God? We are told in Josh.5:5 that the Israelites did not perform circumcisions during their forty years of wandering in the desert, presumably because of the hardships and dangers of travel.

Modern critical analysts offer that, unless more information is unearthed, this episode is forever largely inexplicable. Many see these verses as only a fragment of what must once have been a longer nar-

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rative, and they speculate that perhaps this remnant may not even be relevant here, but, instead, belongs someplace else in the larger story. I believe that, far from being an enigmatic fragment, this passage is complete, revelatory, and relevant exactly as it is and where it is. The purpose of this paper is to argue an interpretation of these verses that is justified by the text and consonant with human nature, that answers the questions raised above, advances the narrative, resonates with an earlier similar episode in Genesis, illuminates Moses' character, and points a moral.

In Gen. 31, God tells Jacob, like Moses, to return to the land of his birth. Jacob, like Moses, must leave his father-in-law, pack up his family, and go back to his relatives in his native land. He sets out on that journey, and, like Moses, suffers in the night some sort of divine attack (Gen. 32:25). Biblical scholars over the centuries have often interpreted this attack figuratively. They say that Jacob experiences a prophetic dream or that he actually wrestles, not with God nor with a messenger of God, but with his own conscience. God initiates the combat, for it is God who prompts Jacob's conscience. Similarly, I interpret the incitement of Moses' dark night of the soul figuratively. The phrase, "The Lord met him and sought to kill him" (Ex. 4:24), can be understood to mean that Moses was overcome with a suicidal depression.

Just as Jacob has earned his guilty conscience, Moses has reason to be depressed. Although he knows that he was born an Israelite, he has been raised as a patrician Egyptian with the attitudes and privileges of his class. During his years in Midian he has become a thoroughly assimilated Midianite with the status of son-in-law of the priest. Now, God reminds him that he is a Hebrew and tells him to give up his comfortable life and throw in his lot with a despised, oppressed, subjugated underclass. God sets Moses a mighty task, but it is not fear of his mission that causes Moses' sickness unto death; it is the challenge to Moses' *persona*. He can no longer be who he thinks he is or who he wishes he were; he has to recognize and become who he truly is. Moses has the archetypal identity crisis.

From the time that he was weaned, he has lived in Pharaoh's court as a favorite of Pharaoh's daughter. Despite his knowledge of consanguinity, it would be natural for Moses to identify with the Egyptians with whom he lived, rather than with his Israelite kindred. He is honored, educated, wealthy, and accustomed to all the luxuries that the flesh-pots of Egypt can afford. What has he to do with slaves? Some commentators maintain that it was loyalty to kin that moved Moses to go out to his brethren and to kill the Egyptian. I think that when he "went out among his brethren" (2:11), he was impelled by curiosity and not by fellowship. It is this same quality that God tests before He calls to Moses at the burning bush. Perhaps He wants to ascertain if the assimilated Moses has become completely materialistic and self-

absorbed, or if he still retains the intellectual curiosity of his younger days: "And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him . . ." (3:4). Nor is Moses biased in favor of his fellow Hebrew when he kills the Egyptian; his pursuit of justice is impartial. We are given three examples in swift succession of Moses's moral intervention. In the first, he kills an Egyptian who was smiting a Hebrew (2:12); in the second he chides one Hebrew for striving with another (2:13); and, in the third, he comes to the aid of Midianite young women (2:17). Whether the contenders are Egyptians, Hebrews, or women of neither stock, Moses flies to the side of the wronged.

The women whom Moses helps at the well turn out to be, serendipitously, the seven daughters of Jethro, the priest or chief of Midian. Or did Moses sit by that well by design in order to meet the priest's daughters? We are first told that he settles in Midian and, then, that he sits by a well (2:15); once settled, he may have assessed the situation and decided that living in a ruler's household is not only his custom but his due. After Moses meets the priest of Midian, my translation says, "And Moses was content to dwell with the man" (2:21). The verb *vayoei*, translated as "was content," may also be translated as "was pleased," "undertook," "resolved," "determined." Up to this point in the Bible many people have gone to dwell in lands not their own: Cain, Abram, Lot, Jacob, Joseph and his family. But in no case is this verb, or any verb, in addition to "dwell," used. Its use in this connection is unique and gives Moses' decision an air of calculation that is underscored by the designation "man" in the same verse. Why is this unspecific denominative used rather than a name or title? I believe that it is to emphasize that Moses stays because of the "man," not because of the "woman." The very sequence of the verse establishes this point; first Moses decides to dwell with the man, then he is given Zipporah to wed. There is certainly no suggestion here of a love-match such as Jacob's; Moses chooses a social position, not a wife.

The priest's daughters tell their father that they have been helped by an Egyptian. In meeting with Moses, the priest can judge for himself, from Moses' regal bearing and educated conversation, that this kind champion of women is not a commoner but was high-born. From his marriage to Zipporah we may deduce that Moses does not hasten to disabuse his new friends of their misapprehension about his origins. After all, fathers, particularly upper class fathers, do not readily give their daughters to escaped felons of slave lineage. That Moses continues the dissimulation is shown by the meaning that he gives for his first son's name: "I was a stranger in a foreign land" (2:22). This rendering implies that the giver was once a citizen in his native land. However, Moses was never really a citizen in his native land; as a Hebrew he was an alien there, too. The Israelites were merely sojourners in Egypt; only an Egyptian had the right to claim citizenship status there. Ad-

ditionally, interpreters have suggested that Moses uses the past ("I was a stranger") rather than the present tense in order to spare his father-in-law's feelings. I believe that he uses it to show how completely he has absorbed the culture and life style of Midian. He had formerly been a stranger in a foreign land, but now he is naturalized and is fully at home in his adopted country. Can this be why his son is not circumcised?

Even when Moses takes leave of his father-in-law, following God's call, and is ready to return to Egypt, he cannot bring himself to disclose his secret. Orthodox exegesis says that humility prevented Moses from mentioning God's mission; instead, he tells his father-in-law that he wants to return to his brethren in Egypt to see if they are still alive (4:18). My interpretation is that Moses tells a very careful truth, one that enables him to retain the fiction that his brethren are Egyptian. Jethro may have perceived Moses' inner dissonance, for when he replies, "Go in peace" (4:18), he uses the preposition "to" or "toward" rather than "in"; that is, "Go toward peace." The word for "peace" also means "wholeness," "completeness," or "harmony." It may have been idiomatic to say "to" or "toward" rather than "in," but this valediction may have been a gentle message that Moses needed to resolve the conflict between his true and his sham identity.

Moses could avoid telling Jethro his background, but he can no longer avoid telling his wife, who is shortly to meet his brother, Aaron. Moses is apprehensive of this meeting for his own reasons, unrelated to Zipporah. We sense this uneasiness when God assures Moses that Aaron will be glad to see him (4:14). Perhaps there was a custom of blood feud or guilt by kinship in Egypt, and Moses fears that Aaron has been made to suffer for Moses' manslaughter, and would therefore resent him. Or, perhaps, Moses knew that Aaron has previously resented him because of his privileged position and life of safety and ease in Pharaoh's court. Zipporah, on the other hand, is probably looking forward to meeting her cultivated and refined in-laws, showing off her sons, seeing new sights. When Moses falls into his profound depression, one can almost hear Zipporah asking him what ails him, and telling him to cheer up. And then he tells her.

Zipporah is enraged. How could he have built their marriage on a lie? How could he have misrepresented himself to her father, who has been so hospitable and generous to him? How could he have expected her, a priest's daughter, to live among slaves, and how could he have intended to expose their children to such degradation? There is no great love here to make Zipporah want to cleave to her husband at any cost. She may not have known much about the deprived and miserable Israelites, but she knows she does not want to be one with them.

Zipporah also knows that the Israelites' *sine qua non* is infant cir-

cumcision. Even though many of them may not have maintained the practice, it was probably known to be their custom, just as today it is widely known that the Jews do not eat pork, even though many do. In her fury, she snatches up a flint and circumcises her son, as if to say to Moses: "You are a Hebrew? Then why not perform the disgusting and barbarous rite of the Hebrews!" Infant circumcision would not seem other than appalling to one whose custom dictated no circumcision or circumcision at puberty, just as most Americans would recoil from the Arabic ritual of pubertal circumcision even while looking benignly on infant circumcision. I believe that Zipporah circumcised her son and not her husband, because I can imagine no man, however torpid, unable to fend off a hysterical woman who is reaching toward his genitals with a sharp rock, and because it is infant, not adult, circumcision that she intended to mock. I do not think, however, that Moses had been circumcised as an infant. Although this practice may have been considered characteristic of the Hebrews, I infer that it had fallen into disuse among perhaps the majority of the slaves. My proof-text is Josh. 5:2,5, and 9. We are told, just after the Israelites finally crossed the Jordan into Canaan, that God ordered Joshua to circumcise the children of Israel "the second time." We are not told of a first mass circumcision; however, traditional exegetes assume that the Hebrews were circumcised *en masse* just before the exodus, because they had not all had the operation in infancy. It has been suggested that blood from these procedures was added to the blood of the paschal lamb, and put on their houses as a token. If the commandment of circumcision had been broken by many of the Hebrews, this dereliction would explain the phrase, "the reproach [or shame] of Egypt" (5:9). It cannot mean, as some have thought, that God had removed from the Israelites the reproach of having once had the lowly status of slaves, as God Himself, after this second circumcision, frequently adjures the Israelites to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt. It must mean the shame or reproach of their failure to fulfill the covenant of circumcision while under Pharaoh's yoke.

If the Egyptians were uncircumcised and Moses had been circumcised, this condition would have betrayed his nationality to Zipporah in Midian. If the Egyptians had practiced circumcision, then it is likely that the Israelites would have maintained their custom, as it would have conformed to the conventions of the dominant culture. Therefore, it seems probable that the Egyptians and most of the Hebrews, including Moses, were uncircumcised. After Zipporah furiously circumcises their son, we are told that she touches the foreskin to "his feet." This is where the euphemism is employed. Others posit that "feet" replaces "genitals" but proffer no explanation of Zipporah's action. I propose that she touched the foreskin to Moses' genitals to make a sign in blood *on* the flesh where there should have been a sign *in* the flesh.

Today, with bloody scenes ubiquitous on television and in the mov-

ies, it is hard to appreciate the potency of blood as a symbol in other times and among other peoples. The Bible tells us that a man becomes ritually impure if he bleeds or if he touches another's blood or even the bedding of a bleeding person (Lev. 15). Jews are not permitted to eat blood or bloody meat, because blood is considered to be the essence of life (Gen. 9:4, Deut. 12:23). Even the word "blood" is powerful. In England, before the 1960s, the adjective "bloody" and any related sanguinary terms were considered to be the most vile and vulgar obscenities.

When Zipporah calls Moses a "bridegroom of blood," she uses the strongest, most insulting language. In Hebrew, the word for bridegroom and the word for son-in-law are the same. The only appropriate occasion to call a man a bridegroom is his wedding day, but I suppose that commentators have found this passage troublesome enough without having to explain Zipporah's reference to her husband as a son-in-law. Yet, that is just how she refers to him. Zipporah, remember, is one of seven daughters. Presumably, her sisters have made marriages befitting their high station. Suitably, they have given the priest of Midian sons-in-law of whom he can be proud. It is her lot, she flings at Moses bitterly, to have married the son-in-law of blood. The sentence, "A bridegroom of blood you are to me" (Ex. 4:25), can be translated, "I have you, a son-in-law of blood!" because the prepositional phrase "to me" is often used to indicate possession. Because of respect, because of sexism, and because of his status, Zipporah uses her father as a referent. It is bad enough that she is married to a man of blood, but it is even worse for her father, the priest of Midian, to be disgraced by a son-in-law of blood. That the phrase, "man of blood," is an execration is shown in II Sam. 16:7-8, in which Shimei curses King David with the expression. It is also used derogatorily in Ps. 5:6, 26:9, 55:23, 59:2, and 139:19. Lest one suppose that Zipporah called Moses this because he had killed a man, the phrase is repeated and clarified: "A son-in-law of blood in regard to the circumcision" (Ex. 4:26). For Zipporah, this seemingly brutal and uncalled for blood-letting symbolizes and epitomizes the odiousness of the Israelites.

The vehement repetition of the phrase "son-in-law" is echoed and exaggerated with wry irony in 18:1-27, when the relative eminence of Jethro and Moses is reversed. At this time, Moses has brought his people safely out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, vanquishing Pharaoh and his legions; he has become a hero. Jethro, with Zipporah and her children whom Moses had sent away (18:12), now comes to Moses' encampment. New luster is added to Jethro's name by his identification as Moses' father-in-law. The phrase "father-in-law" is repeated thirteen times in twenty-seven verses.

In the verse cited above, we are told that Moses has sent Zipporah away. I contend that they parted in anger immediately after the cir-

cumcision scene. Conventional opinion asserts that he sent his family back to Midian at some later unrecorded time, to keep them safe from the plagues and from Pharaoh's wrath. However, it would have been impolitic for Moses to send his wife and children to safety when Aaron, the elders of Israel, and the other Hebrews could not protect their families. Also, if Zipporah has saved Moses' life by her intuitive and immediate action, as traditional interpretation affirms, what better help-mate could he have had at times of danger? The fact that Moses sends Zipporah away supports my argument that in the "bridegroom of blood" passage the veil has been lifted for us briefly on a violent scene of marital strife.

Zipporah's rampage is shock therapy to Moses. He is roused from his depression, "... so He let him alone" (4:26), and he arises a changed man. Moses' transformation parallels Jacob's. Jacob limps after his encounter with God. I construe that metaphorically to mean that Jacob, who once was quick, quick to usurp his brother, trick his father, choose a wife, and make a vow, from that time on drags his feet and reacts with deliberation as, for example, in his measured response to Reuben's offence, and to Dinah's rape. Moses, too, changes. He knows who he is, and that his identity is bound up with the children of Israel; in Ex. 32:32 he offers his life for them. He marries a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1), herself an object of prejudice, who could not enhance his status; he is no longer interested in position.

Though some apologists have said that "the Cushite woman" refers to Zipporah and not a second wife, the redundancy of the reference is a distinct indicator of a second marriage: "... the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman" (12:1). If Zipporah were "the Cushite woman," the first phrase would have sufficed to denote her. Therefore, the repetitive second phrase must signify a subsequent marriage. Perhaps Zipporah's abuse provokes him to seek out, and enables him to empathize with, a Cushite. As no other patriarch has willingly taken a second wife during the lifetime of his first wife, this emphatic allusion to a second marriage is further corroboration of the discord between Moses and Zipporah.

To sum up: my reading of the "bridegroom of blood" passage is that God causes a threat to Moses' life, by permitting him to sink into a desperate depression caused by an inner personality conflict that is associated with Moses' failure fully to accept his Jewish identity. In his distress, he reveals to Zipporah that he is a Hebrew. She becomes infuriated because of his prior duplicity and the abhorrent prospect of joining his people in slavery. Striking out, she circumcises their son in a travesty of the Israelite rite, and contemptuously calls Moses a "son-in-law of blood." Zipporah's violence jolts Moses out of his despondency, and forces him to recognize his essential nature.

The lesson inherent in the "bridegroom of blood" passage is not

the supremacy of the covenant of circumcision; the moral, according to my analysis, is implied in the name that God reveals to Moses at the burning bush: "I Am That I Am" (Ex. 3:14). The Hebrew admits of varying translations: "I Will Be That/What/Who I Will Be," or "I Am That/What/Who I Am." There are a great many philosophical and homiletical explanations of this name. Surely, one more explanation for God's use of this particular name at this particular time is to teach Moses and all men that ultimately you are who you are. God, with sublime assurance, says "I Am Who I Am." Moses, made in God's image but just a man, has to struggle to embrace and integrate this fundamental credo.

Rachel, to Rebekah

JANET RUTH HELLER

In my travail, you hold me,
Your round arms freckled like fawns,
Your body as large as your heart.

Under the oak tree,
You tell me stories about Jacob:
The time he stole the birthright,
And the time you helped him
Win his father's blessing.

I want my son
To be like Jacob.

We entered this family of chosen ones
Because we were not afraid
To speak to strangers
By the well of Haran.
But now both of us are quiet.

Your steady eyes are the color of honey.
I watch their tender gleam.
When I rest my dark head on your shoulder,
I think I can bear the pain.

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The Children's Crusade: The Tzivos Hashem Youth Movement as an Aspect of Hasidic Identity

BONNIE J. MORRIS

In times of war, God forbid, homes are converted into hospitals and fortresses . . . for it is WAR. We are living in a time when we are fighting the battle for Yiddishkeit [Judaism] against overwhelming odds. Firstly, there are the secularists and atheists who mock religion. Secondly, there are those who mock Torah-true Judaism and put all their efforts into watering down and perverting authentic Judaism. Thirdly, there are the christian [sic] missionaries, who grasp every opportunity to convert the Jewish soul.¹

WITHIN THE HASIDIC COMMUNITY OF Crown Heights, Brooklyn, live approximately 20,000 devoted followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (a Yiddish word for rabbi).² The "Rebbe," their leader, is 88-year-old Menachem M. Schneerson, whose chief goal is the transformation of American Jewry into an observant community by a Hasidic revolution. The Rebbe and his Hasidim believe that through this transformation, both Jews and Judaism — Jewish population and piety — will be sufficiently enhanced to bring about the coming of the Messiah and an end to worldwide Jewish persecution and suffering.

The present Rebbe assumed leadership in 1950, inheriting the coveted and challenging position from his late father-in-law, who had fled Tsarist and Soviet pogroms for Brooklyn's Hasidic ghetto in the 1930s. In becoming the seventh Rebbe in a dynasty of Lubavitcher activists dating back to the birth of Hasidic Judaism in the eighteenth century, Menachem M. Schneerson pledged to uphold his sect's credo of missionary

1. Rabbi M. Feller, "Guest Speaker," *The Souvenir Journal* of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Lubavitch Women's Organization, May 1963, p. 13.

2. The Lubavitchers themselves are reluctant to provide a precise estimate of their following. *The New York Times* listed 20,000 as an estimate of the greater Brooklyn Lubavitcher population (*The New York Times*, September 5, 1988); the Lubavitcher Youth Organization *Tzach Directory* of 1987 listed 750 families living in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn alone, 146 missionary families scattered across the continental United States, and over 200 Chabad centers in 25 foreign countries.

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outreach to assimilated Jews. Each generation of Lubavitcher Rebbes overcame mistrust, secular persecution, jail, and exile, in the effort to spread the teachings of Hasidism to less observant Jews in Eastern Europe. Menachem Schneerson's predecessor, the beloved sixth Rebbe, had also established Crown Heights' fledgling community of devoutly observant immigrants in the years before, and during, World War II. By 1950, the Lubavitcher community of Brooklyn was a mixture of Holocaust refugees, second-generation Russian emigres, renowned religious scholars, and a few Americanized Jews who had elected to return to their roots. It was the new Rebbe's task to devise a series of outreach policies that would bring Jewish services and Jewish education to the vast numbers of American Jews who had broken ties with the Orthodox traditions of their forebears.

Between 1950 and 1980, the Rebbe succeeded remarkably in bringing Lubavitcher activists onto college campuses, subways, street corners, shopping malls, and anywhere that young Jews might be found. These activists were part of the "Chabad" movement, the proselytizing arm of Lubavitch Hasidism. Chabad Houses at universities offered instruction in religious practices and other activities, designed to attract apathetic Jews to a traditionally observant family lifestyle. Students were invited to spend a weekend in Crown Heights with a Lubavitcher family, to sample Hasidic life and, perhaps, to hear the Rebbe speak on a festival day. As the outreach programs grew in scope, so did the pool of activists recruited by the Rebbe. Women, in particular, enjoyed an expanded role in the seventh Lubavitcher dynasty, for the Rebbe determined that they, too, should leave the home front on occasion, and spread Hasidic teachings among other Jewish women.

The mobilization of Lubavitcher women as outreach activists between 1950-1980 resulted in an equally significant trend: the mobilization of children, through an organization designed to assist parents in disseminating religious goals to their youngsters. Through the children's movement known as *Tzivos Hashem* (the "Army of God"), Lubavitcher and non-Hasidic Jewish children across the United States began participating in Orthodox proselytizing campaigns. They found encouragement in numerous rewards offered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself.

Tzivos Hashem

Tzivos Hashem was founded by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Autumn, 1980. Using the metaphor that Orthodox Judaism was in a crucial stage of attack by the evil forces of secularism, the Rebbe declared a spiritual state of war, and urged all Jewish children to respond to his call by joining God's army. Using the popular slogan, "We Want *Moshiach* (The Messiah) Now!" the *Tzivos Hashem* movement offered to its young members the opportunity to advance through symbolic military promotions by per-

forming *mizvot* — religious and political deeds of merit. Instead of merit badges or Scouting-style rewards, however, children active in *Tzivos Hashem* received points toward “captain” or “lieutenant” status. This military theme affected every aspect of *Tzivos Hashem* and its advertising campaign, from posters of Beetle Bailey announcing “I WANT YOU” to paramilitary uniforms and caps in all sizes. *Tzivos Hashem* promised all Jewish children an official ID card and serial number, with the understanding that each member, boy or girl, began at the bottom as a private in the Army.

The more you work at learning Torah and doing Mitzvos, [the *Tzivos Hashem Newsletter* assured] the higher rank you will earn — and the more prizes you will win too! Each time you do a special mission, you score points. When you have enough points to go up in rank, you win a prize and receive a new ID card.³

The movement’s newsletter, published from 1982 on, explained the regulations for promotion: after accumulating 20 points, a child made sergeant, and proceeded upwards through the ranks toward the ultimate achievement of 1,000 points for the title of General.⁴ “Special Missions,” which awarded bonus points, included studying extra Torah, writing compositions about Jewish history and genealogy, filling out Biblical trivia questionnaires, and so forth. While the majority of the “missions” were religious in content, others were blatantly political. In the summer of 1983, the *Tzivos Hashem Newsletter* included an advertisement for the following Special Mission, which was worth up to 20 points upon completion:

This summer we have a very special mission for you. This is a big one, and we are going to be mobilizing the entire membership of Tzivos Hashem to carry it out! Here’s what it’s all about. We want to help millions of school-children in America, who are not being allowed to learn about Hashem [God] in their schools. They do not learn that He is the Creator of the world, and that He sees and hears everything we do. A second problem is that in schools where children *do* get to learn about Hashem, the expensive buses, health services, and textbooks have to be paid for by the schools themselves.

In public schools, the government helps a great deal to pay for these things. This is highly unfair, and makes it very hard for parochial schools. Parochial schools should get just as much help as public schools, so that they can give the best education possible to their students.

Many people in our great and free country want to fix these terrible problems; but they need your help. Therefore, the new mission for every boy and girl is to send a petition (a serious request) to President Reagan, and to your Senators and Congressmen, to make laws that will allow schoolchildren to start their school with a “moment of silence,” a moment to think about Hashem. Also, we want to ask in our petition that parochial schools be treated fairly, and given money for non-religious services just like public schools.

3. *Tzivos Hashem Children’s Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1983: 40.

4. *Ibid.*

Boys and Girls! I am sure you understand the importance of this mission, and will be proud to help. Below, you will find your petitions. Sign your name and address and send all four copies back to us at Tzivos Hashem as soon as you can. For bonus points, get your friends to sign too.⁵

Attached to this Special Mission announcement were neatly prepared petition copies, addressed to Dear Mr. President, Dear Senator, and Dear Congressman, with specific places at the bottom of each page for children's signatures. The petitions asked for funds to be made available for non-religious programs within parochial schools, such as transportation, nonsectarian library texts, language and science instruction, psychological services, and physical education programs. The petitions went on to support the idea of a moment of silence at the start of the public school day, and concluded,

Such an arrangement does not violate the establishment clause or the opinions by the Supreme Court interpreting the establishment clause. Moreover, the salutary effect of such an arrangement would be quite substantial and greatly benefit the students, the schools, and the community in general.⁶

This issue of the *Tzivos Hashem Newsletter* outlined other missions for the Summer of 1983, and contained a Mission Card describing the options for the soldier interested in gaining a promotion by September. Worth 20 points each were the Special Missions of "I learned extra Torah 50 days this summer," "I gave extra charity on 50 days," and "I said an extra prayer or Psalm for 50 days." Worth 10 points each were "I signed the petition to President Reagan" and "I got 3 friends to sign the petition." Finally, for two points, "I signed up three friends for Tzivos Hashem. Their addresses are enclosed."⁷ Therefore, a dedicated soldier could earn up to 82-plus points over a two-month period, easily making the coveted promotion from sergeant to sergeant major — or, for the already advanced member, a promotion from major to colonel.

The supreme irony of *Tzivos Hashem* was that petitioning the government was equivalent, in points, to prayer or giving charity. A child could advance in a fiercely religious organization by accumulating points derived from secular activities, such as membership drives and government petitioning. Obviously, the small children for whom the *Newsletter* was intended were hardly equipped to interpret the petitions printed in the summer of 1983. Many Hasidic children, reared in Yiddish-speaking homes and sent to Yiddish-based religious schools, were not yet familiar with basic English expressions, let alone with the language of constitutional law. The *Newsletter* was, in this instance and on other occasions, intended for parents, who were to explain and interpret the "Special Mission"

5. Ibid., p. 36.

6. Ibid., p. 37.

7. Ibid., p. 16.

to their children. For parents, the mission was clear: if the State required secular subjects and services, should not the State pay for it?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, although known among other Hasidic sects for having attended a secular university, clearly expressed his belief that secular studies were a waste of time that otherwise could be spent in Torah study. In a personal editorial for the *Tzivos Hashem Newsletter*, he declared that the State-mandated curriculum deliberately diverted Hasidic youth into non-religious classes — with the result that children's souls become “undernourished.”⁸

These were the concerns that had led the Rebbe to found *Tzivos Hashem*. Torah, and Torah time, were being attacked by secular forces. By familiarizing children with the idea that most secular studies and activities were superfluous, and downright wasteful of religious study time, the Rebbe asserted the primacy of the Hasidic curriculum. By encouraging youngsters to reclaim lost time through summer Torah study, the Rebbe did parents a favor, too. The “missions” kept otherwise restless children dutifully memorizing religious homework all summer long, with the incentive of promotion in the Fall, during the important High Holiday season.

It would be unfair to characterize *Tzivos Hashem* in political terms alone. The popularity of the organization reflected its significance as an educational innovation that appealed directly to children, and considered them capable of adult tasks. Within six months after the establishment of *Tzivos Hashem* in late 1980, over 40,000 children had joined; by 1988 over 300,000 members belonged.⁹ Both boys and girls were featured in the newsletters, and there was no gender bias in promotion procedure or in Special Mission assignments. *Tzivos Hashem* is the one facet of Hasidic life where boys and girls may compete on equal footing for the same, publicly noted rewards. The particular sibling rivalry stemming from a gender-conscious culture can be channelled into healthy religious competition for prizes, recognition, and rank promotions. Well aware of this tactic, the Rebbe demanded that boys and girls be equally represented in the two regular *Tzivos Hashem* publications, *The Moshiach Times* and the *Tzivos Hashem Children's Newsletter*.¹⁰

While the inclusion of both sexes in a youth movement was a step forward for Lubavitcher Hasidism, and attracted progressive Orthodox families as well, the strong military content of the organization alarmed some parents. One irate father, not a Lubavitcher, wrote to the Rebbe in

8. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

9. *The New York Times*, February 7, 1989, p. B-4. (Photograph)

10. Aidel Backman, a Lubavitcher woman who did artwork for the *Moshiach Times*, was personally ordered by the Rebbe to change a cover illustration to feature both boys and girls. Aidel Backman, “The Trials and Tribulations of an Artist,” *Di Yiddishe Heim*, vol. 24, no. 1, Summer 1983: 17-18. Based on an address to the 21st Midwinter Convention of *Neshei Ubnos Chabad* (The Sons and Daughters of Chabad).

1981, and complained that the purportedly religious campaign seemed to be based "...on the glorification of the military and an aggrandizement of arms, wars, and battlefields."¹¹ The Rebbe replied in a public letter, printed in the magazine of the Lubavitch Women's Organization, and stated that the sole purpose of *Tzivos Hashem* was to bring children closer to the Almighty.

To begin with, *Tzivos Hashem* — as you surely know — is not a "foreign" idea. It is first mentioned in the Torah in reference to "G-d's Hosts" who were liberated from Egyptian bondage. The term is clearly not used in the military sense. Rather, it indicates that the Hosts who had been enslaved to Pharaoh to serve him, were now *G-d's Hosts*, free to serve G-d, and G-d alone.

Of course, the Torah does not glorify militarism, war, and the like. On the contrary, "its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace."¹²

Regardless of the Rebbe's placating response, there was no question that *Tzivos Hashem* relied upon a rigid military theme. Rabbi David Wichnin, an educator in the Lubavitcher community, praised the very military element which the Rebbe denied existed, in a series of articles on the relevance of *Tzivos Hashem* to children's education. Rabbi Wichnin suggested that the concept of a universal war against evil, or, at the very least, a state of emergency, presented a fascinating challenge to children: it encouraged them to overcome the everyday temptations within themselves, and the attractive but dangerous temptations of secular society. In his writings for the Lubavitcher press, Rabbi Wichnin presented an entirely military view of the continuum of Jewish history and leadership, calling God the "Supreme Commander," and parents, teachers and principals, "officers of various ranks."¹³

Parents, too, were to observe the discipline of the war effort, and give their all. As *Tzivos Hashem* was one of the Rebbe's pet projects, parents who were delinquent in enrolling their children ran the risk of appearing disloyal to the Rebbe, irresponsible to the Supreme Commander, and indifferent to their children's very well-being. Rabbi Wichnin suggested that parents should view *Tzivos Hashem* as a real war effort, not as a gimmick, and cited an incident in which a critically injured boy experienced a miraculous recovery after the Rebbe promoted him to a higher rank in *Tzivos Hashem*. Wichnin explained that

He will need to be stronger and in good health to perform the higher level of duty now demanded of him, and for this G-d will surely give him improved health ... In other cases, too, when young children have been in accidents or similar calamities, the Rebbe has asked whether they are en-

11. "Letter of Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlite," *Di Yiddische Heim*, vol. 24, no. 2, Winter 1984, inside cover.

12. Ibid.

13. Rabbi David Wichnin, "Tzivos Hashem: A New Dimension in Chinuch," in *The Rebbe: Changing the Tide of Education*, ed. Mayer Rivkin (Brooklyn: Lubavitch Youth Organization, 1982), p. 115.

rolled in *Tzivos Hashem* — with the obvious implication that this answer will assure their well-being.¹⁴

Joining *Tzivos Hashem* thus became an essential step in the protection of children. For the organization to succeed, adult Lubavitcher women had to be recruited as activists and as parents who would transmit *Tzivos Hashem* goals to their children. Thus, involvement in the Rebbe's growing youth movement became another basic *hinukh* (educational) responsibility in the litany of female childrearing obligations. Lubavitcher mothers were expected to instruct their children that not only must all Jews live in daily expectation of the Messiah, but in the daily spiritual parentheses of war. The combination of continual anticipation with quasi-military preparation formed an excellent disciplinary program for children, welcomed by the mothers of large families.

In 1982, the *Tzivos Hashem* organization issued a ten-point checklist for parents on how to gain children's interest and compliance. This list suggested speaking to a child as to a soldier; telling children stories about Jewish military heroes; decorating children's bedrooms and classrooms with army themes; instilling discipline in children through marching drills; and other activities combining religion with a military theme: frequent reciting of Torah passages, stressing how these are Torah "bombs" launched against the enemy — the *Yezer Ha-ra*; and doing *Mitzvot*, stressing how these are also "bombs" and also make the Jewish Army strong.¹⁵

Marketing Tzivos Hashem in the Community

One of the main objectives of *Tzivos Hashem* was to make Jewish heroes and Jewish victory themes attractive to children growing up in secular, militaristic American society. For centuries, due to Jewish disenfranchisement in most societies, there had been a dearth of Jewish military heroes. History and literature portrayed the Jew as a victim, underdog, disenfranchised citizen — the symbol of a people condemned to wander the earth. Until the formation of the State of Israel in the mid-twentieth century, the Jewish military heroes and victors whom a mother might stress in her child's education were limited to Biblical figures, or, later, martyrs in the Warsaw Ghetto uprisings. Lubavitcher children, growing up in a world obsessed with military superiority and aggressive standards of masculinity, were easily attracted to the heroes outside of Jewish culture. While the Rebbe provided the solution to this problem with the establishment of *Tzivos Hashem*, it was Lubavitcher women who had first issued the call for Jewish-oriented children's games — educational materials and toys which celebrated Jewish values while satisfying their American-born children's interests in "superheroes."

14. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

15. Avroham Kass, "The Child and His Hero," in *The Rebbe: Changing The Tide of Education*, p. 167.

As early as 1963, seventeen years before the Rebbe launched the *Tzi-vos Hashem* organization, concerned women were writing to *Di Yiddishe Heim* (The Jewish Home, a quarterly magazine for Lubavitcher women) about the lack of relevant Jewish youth literature. This void made secular stories and role models an easy alternative for parents and teachers alike, despite vigilance against other forms of assimilation and the absence of television sets in Lubavitcher homes. In the Fall, 1963, issue of *Di Yiddishe Heim*, teacher Elaine Fishman addressed the problem of this lack of Jewish heroes in her article, "Children and the Hero Image." She cited an example of assimilation in the educational process, by confiding that her own class of kindergarteners believed that Abraham Lincoln freed the Jews. She wrote, "Here is where the preparation or intervention of Jewish women can do the most good, by combating the tangible and ever-present adverse influences around us. . . . By bringing 'our stars' closer, we leave little room for 'other stars' to enter."¹⁶ Fishman defined those other stars as ". . . sports heroes, entertainment figures, people (whether on earth or in orbit) in the public eye, or even historical and fictional characters."¹⁷ She respectfully reminded her readers that the Rebbe's own message to Lubavitcher women, at the Eighth Annual Convention of the Lubavitcher Women's Organization, had been the preservation of the home as a holy sanctuary, untainted by impurities from outside society.

The interest that Lubavitcher women demonstrated in reclaiming Jewish heroes tells us that they did not see their history in the same light as those historians who praised Judaism's de-emphasis on militarism. In *The Jewish Woman in America*, authors Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel presented a critique of Jewish gender roles, based upon the relative absence of military-derived *machismo*. Their analysis proposed that creative standards for masculinity within Jewish culture also freed the Jewish woman from excessively passive or dominated roles. Baum, Hyman and Michel found that, historically, lacking both an army and a recognized polity, Jewish males had ". . . expressed their masculinity in the synagogue and the house of study, not on the battlefield and not through the physical oppression of women."¹⁸

This theory, of comparatively non-sexist gender roles within Judaism, was not the image that Lubavitchers wished to uphold. Emphasizing gender differences and responsibilities was the most important part of the Lubavitch socialization of children. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the women's movement in the United States challenged traditional sex roles, and began to offer alternative visions of socialization, Lubavitcher women vehemently rejected non-sexist toys and literature for chil-

16. Elaine Fishman, "Children and the Hero Image," *Di Yiddishe Heim*, vol. 5, no. 2, Fall 1963: 19.

17. Ibid.

18. Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 14.

dren, on the grounds that such innovations undermined Hasidic values. Women wrote to *Di Yiddishe Heim* defending the censorship of non-sexist books in order to prevent Jewish children's access to such notions. A particular target was the popular book and record, "Free To Be You And Me," based on a 1974 television special. The record, which was sold through *MS Magazine*, advocated non-sexist childrearing, the legitimacy of strength for girls and emotions for boys, and the freedom of children to form career ambitions unlimited by sex-role stereotyping. One Lubavitcher teacher, Chana Sharfstein, claimed that the record indoctrinated children with "the need to be free . . . Free to be what? Wild, tamed (sic), uncivilized?"¹⁹ She supported the censorship of "Free To Be You and Me" on the grounds that "Particularly today, when immorality and indecency are becoming an integral part of our world, we must closely scrutinize everything that touches us and our children, to hinder contamination."²⁰

Because secular toys and games were forbidden, the Lubavitcher community had to market its own educational and recreational accessories for children. This is precisely what happened with *Tzivos Hashem*. The problems of shopping for suitable Lubavitcher toys and games — a job which fell almost exclusively to mothers — was solved with the establishment of the *Tzivos Hashem* Store on Kingston Avenue in Crown Heights. The store opened in 1983, with a stock of kosher games, puzzles, pencils, books, videos, tapes, stickers, posters, school supplies, t-shirts, and *Tzivos Hashem* educational materials in several languages. The ubiquitous slogan, "We Want *Moschiach* Now" appeared stencilled on shirts, army-style caps, patches, bumper stickers, and pins.

By far the most popular item marketed for Lubavitcher children was a comic book series entitled *Mendy and the Golem*. This Lubavitcher answer to Superman comics began publication in 1980.²¹ Painstaking efforts went into the creation of a hero family both identifiably Lubavitcher and yet appealing to non-Hasidic Jewish children. Therefore, references to the Rebbe were almost non-existent, and the comic panels featured unrealistically liberal Jewish family roles, such as father fixing supper while mother repaired the car or studied *kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism). In the era of Rambo, the comics served an obvious purpose: pop heroism and easy-to-read drama in kosher style, with all characters dressed in Orthodox fashion and obeying the Commandments. The artists were all well aware of the temptations of secular culture, and offered numerous relevant sagas in which young Lubavitcher children were lured into non-Jewish pas-

19. Chana Sharfstein, "Free To Be . . . ?" *Di Yiddishe Heim*, vol. 16, no. 2, Autumn 1974: 18.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

21. Drawn by Leibel Estrin and David Sears, it is published six times a year, and claims under its copyright, "All names and places are actual or Torah-inspired (oral and/or written.)"

times, only to be won back to Torah through discussion or brute force. In addition to the action of Mendy and his family, the comics featured "Torah Tales," "Stories of Our Sages," advertisements for *Tzivos Hashem* toys, and letters from readers (including non-Jewish fans.)

Lubavitcher women became *Tzivos Hashem's* strongest advocates. Having issued the demand for Lubavitcher toys and stories, mothers enthusiastically supported the organization from its outset, and incorporated *Tzivos Hashem* materials into outreach packets for less observant Jewish women. Those women who served as outreach workers for *Neshei Chabad* went from door to door in Jewish neighborhoods, distributing subscription forms for *Mendy and the Golem* and the *Tzivos Hashem Newsletter*, and urging Jewish mothers to enlist their children in *Tzivos Hashem*.²²

Lubavitcher women also became involved in the petition campaign for federal aid to parochial schools. This was a project dear to their hearts, for the very good reason that Beth Rivkah, the Lubavitch girls' school, was in a continual state of disrepair. Hasidic female education remains wracked by poverty, although no expenses are spared in the religious education of young men, who are destined to become the community's scholars in years to come. Without a philanthropic base, Beth Rivkah depended upon the fund-raising efforts of the students' mothers, who were quickly exhausted by constant rounds of such work. Hence, the concept of federal funding delighted Lubavitcher women, for it assured support for vital services, and was gender-blind.

The plight of female education was such a ubiquitous Lubavitcher topic that one issue of *Mendy and the Golem* portrayed the crisis. In this 1982 comic book, little Rivke Klein's school — called Bais Challah in the story — was unable to meet its mortgage payments, and a non-observant Jewish businessman threatened to buy out the school and turn it into a high-class dog kennel. When the young girls attempted to save their school through a series of unsuccessful bake sales, the businessman was moved by the scent of their freshly baked *hallah*, and wept, "You girls remind me of my dear old mother! Please accept my heartfelt apologies and my check for *tsedokah* (charity)!"²³ This theme of the hard-hearted, "modern" Jew, moved to reclaim his Orthodox heritage by finding young women who remind him of his observant mother, occurs constantly in Lubavitcher literature, to emphasize the influence that women possess as mothers and as community role models. Yet, in the comic strip, it was food that softened the enemy's resistance; he was not moved by the sight of young girls studying Torah in the academic hall. Tradition and domesticity, not scholarship, are the hallmarks of feminine success, and, thus, funding for female education lags infinitely behind efforts to improve male *yeshivot*. Although *Tzivos Hashem* provided a remarkable role for

22. Flyer: "N'shei Ubnos Chabad Mitzvoim (sic) Guide Form," 1983.

23. *Mendy and the Golem*. vol. 1, no. 4, 1982: 8.

young girls to cross gender lines and wear Generals' hats, the toys and publications of *Tzivos Hashem* ultimately reinforced Hasidic gender values.

Is *Tzivos Hashem* a mere expression of resistance to the assimilation of Jews in secular Western society? Or does the movement have a deeper significance as a metaphor of Jewish military strength in an anti-Semitic world? In mobilizing his own community to spread Hasidic values among less observant Jews, the Lubavitcher Rebbe could not neglect the potential activism of children. Their participation in religious campaigns, and subsequent preparation for roles as adult Hasidic missionaries, required a youth movement that crossed gender and sect boundaries. Any Jewish child could join *Tzivos Hashem* and, through the newsletters and promotions, participate in a national network of motivated, Jewish-identified youth. The end result was religious, not military, commencement and involvement.

The success of the military theme reflects several phenomena. The Reagan administration's impact on the 1980s included both a call for commitment to religious values and a build-up of arms and military preparation. Had the Rebbe introduced *Tzivos Hashem* in the late 1960s, when many American Jews were involved in the anti-war movement, youth periodicals couched in pro-military language might have had a limited audience in the very non-observant community that the Rebbe wished to include. The 1980s also saw the reduced credibility of the State of Israel in light of the Palestinian *intifada*, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, as the Hasidic leader most loyal to Israel, continued to praise Israeli military control while others criticized it. As residents of the United States and sympathizers with the State of Israel, therefore, the Lubavitcher lived daily with military metaphor — and, as Jews, they were subjected to contradictory stereotypes of both historical passivity and contemporary Zionist aggression.

The Rebbe's solution offered a program of Jewish pride and education by recasting military symbols as paths to better spiritual achievement. The involvement of young mothers and their daughters also placed *Tzivos Hashem* in the realm of the new female opportunities created by the Rebbe since he assumed Lubavitcher leadership in 1950. Thus, while the military theme offended and continues to offend some religious Jews, it filled a vacuum in the Lubavitcher community, replacing secular games and goals with Hasidic-oriented children's activities. Mothers found a new range of religiously acceptable distractions for their families, saving many hours that were once spent on the invention of such alternatives at home. Financially and ideologically, *Tzivos Hashem* is now a crucial part of the Lubavitcher outreach platform, and a second generation of Jewish children in America has begun the climb from Buck Private to General in the Army of God.

The Power of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye in Midrashic Literature

BRIGITTE KERN-ULMER

THE BELIEF IN THE EVIL EYE IS FOUND throughout the ancient cultures that came into contact with Judaism,¹ but the Hebrew Bible gave less room to ideas of magic and superstition than did Babylonian, Egyptian or Persian texts. However, in ancient and early medieval rabbinic Judaism, the Evil Eye was perceived as an occurrence of every-day life, part of the reality that the rabbis had to deal with in their own manner of understanding and interpretation. This is the reason why it is prevalent in rabbinic texts. Though the use of the Evil Eye is explained from the point of view of magic, the means believed to be effective for protection or healing are often religious ones.

In order to describe the multifaceted concepts of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye in rabbinic literature, one has to look at texts that are, at times, several centuries apart. This does not pose a particular problem, since rabbinic literature is a literature of quotations and of parallel texts; similar ideas and the same rabbinic statements are quoted in different texts. These quotations preserve former meanings in later texts. On the other hand, new ideas tend to be added to the old ones. This is particularly true for the concept of the powerful Eye, which, in later texts, is often added as an *explicans*: "This came about because of the Eye." The Evil Eye is also found in Jewish folk-belief, where it has played a major role until modern times.

In rabbinic literature, the Evil Eye usually denotes the power of an individual to affect others adversely by merely looking at them. The Evil Eye is often seen as an expression of envy and hatred. One source contends that the Evil Eye was considered the major cause of death.² It is listed as one of the seven causes of sickness or disaster.³ The uti-

1. S. Seligmann, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker* (Berlin, 1910); S. Seligmann, *Die Zauberkraft des Auges und das Berufen. Ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte des Aberglaubens* (Hamburg, 1922); W. Spiegelberg, "Der böse Blick im altägyptischen Glauben," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 59 (1967), pp. 149-54; S. Langdon, "An Incantation in the 'House of Light' Against the Evil Eye" in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), pp. 39-40; T. Siebers, *The Mirror of Medusa* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1983); A. Löwinger, "Der Böse Blick," *Menorah* 4 (1926): 551-556; A. Brav, "The Evil Eye among the Hebrews," *Ophthalmology* 5 (1908): 427-35 (repr. in A. Dundes, *Op. cit.*).
2. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Mezia* 107b (also Palestinian Talmud, *Shabbat* 14, 14c).

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lization of the Evil Eye can be the starting point of sin.⁴ In fact, one text holds that the Evil Eye is the highest sin.⁵ Not only does the Evil Eye have the potential to have a malevolent impact upon this world, but also on the world to come.⁶

However, the possessor of an Evil Eye is not necessarily an evil person. The Talmud cautions all people against looking at their neighbour's orchard or field, in order not to invoke the Evil Eye over them,⁷ which implies an inadvertent act. It should be emphasized that the Evil Eye could be used to accomplish a moral purpose. For example, righteous people could utilize an Evil Eye to inflict pain or death upon the wicked. This is demonstrated in a short narrative passage about two rabbis, in which they are attacked by street robbers.⁸ As an act of self-defense, one of them, R. Ele'azar, merely looks at the robbers. This act leads to the appearance of two snakes that by their bite cause the death of the robbers, whereupon Rabbi Ele'azar says the following blessing: "*Berikh Raḥmana deshezevan* — Blessed is the Merciful One who saved us." In this example, the Evil Eye was viewed as a Divine instrumentality to accomplish a moral purpose.

However, even if the Evil Eye is supposedly used for a moral purpose, there are inherent dangers in this practice that can lead to extreme acts of fanaticism. In one such instance, R. Shim'on and his son, R. Ele'azar, were extremely righteous people who, for twelve years, hid in a cave from the tyrant Hadrian.⁹ Upon the latter's death, the two men emerged from the cave and were outraged by the immoral world that they encountered. This led them to use the Evil Eye to burn down everything that they were witnessing. At this point, a *bat kol*, a heavenly voice, interrupted their religious zealotry and declared: "Have you left your cave in order to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" Apparently, God preferred to allow the immoral world to continue rather than let it be destroyed. Although the Evil Eye in this case was allegedly used for a moral purpose, God intervened to save His world.

As can be seen from these two examples, righteous people could utilize their Evil Eye to carry out their understanding of justice in this world and to punish the wicked. In this context, the Talmud declares that the rabbis have a unique power concerning the Evil Eye. As it is stated in the Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 7b: "Wherever the Sages cast their eyes in disapproval, death or poverty resulted."

Perhaps this statement can be comprehended on at least two dif-

3. Babylonian Talmud, *Arakhin* 16 a.

4. *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* 9.

5. *Derekh Erez Zuta* 6.

6. *Pirke Avot* 5:22.

7. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 2.

8. *Zohar* III, 262a.

9. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 33b.

ferent levels. First, on a literal level, the Evil Eye of *Hazal*, Our Sages, had the physical power to destroy instantly. On a secondary level, this passage may have the following implication: the righteous indignation of our Sages had the capacity to reduce or eliminate evil. According to this explanation, the rabbis could focus their moral judgment upon the evil-doers and, thereby, terminate their evil behavior.

The power of the Evil Eye has one significant limitation. It can have impact upon objects or people only if they are visible to the Evil Eye. In the Talmud we find a dictum of Rabbi Yizhak, stating: "A blessing is found only in what is hidden from the eye."¹⁰ By this he meant that those objects or people that are hidden from the eye have a unique status and are exempt from danger. The proof-text that is cited is Deut. 28:8, which says, in part: "The Lord will ordain blessings upon your store-houses." The word "store-houses" in this verse is understood by the rabbis as "hidden things." The rabbis believed that "hidden things" were immune from the power of the Evil Eye. Its impotence in respect to "hidden things" is summarized by a teaching of the School of R. Yishma'el, which states that "a blessing comes only to that over which the Eye has no power."¹¹

The converse of this concept is that the more visible an object, the greater jeopardy it has in respect to the Evil Eye, as illustrated in the following text:

Our rabbis taught: He who trades in cane and jars will never see a sign of blessing. Why? Since their bulk is large, the Eye has power over them.¹²

The opposite of the Evil Eye is the Good Eye. The distinction between the two is comparable to the *yezer ha-ra* and the *yezer ha-tov*, the Evil Inclination and the Good Inclination. Possession of the Evil Eye in combination with the Evil Inclination is attributed to Cain. In a midrash,¹³ the scriptural passage, *He that has an Evil Eye hastens after riches* (Prov. 28:22), is applied to Cain. Balaam also had an Evil Eye; he was prevented from using it only by God,¹⁴ which can be understood as changing his Evil Inclination into a Good Inclination and his Evil Eye into a Good Eye. Moses undoubtedly had a Good Eye.¹⁵ R. Yehoshua lists the Evil Eye together with the Evil Inclination in *Pirke Avot* 2:16, when he concludes: "The Evil Eye, the Evil Inclination, and hatred of mankind shorten a man's life."

As can be recalled from earlier examples, the user of the Evil Eye is not necessarily an evil person. However, the possessor of a Good

10. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Me'zia* 42a.

11. Ibid.

12. Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 50b.

13. *Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 31:17.

14. Rashi on Num. 24:2.

15. Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 38a.

Eye is invariably a good person. One who has the Good eye is involved in the performance of *mizvot*. In a midrash, Moses is said to have had a Good Eye because he shared the Torah with Israel.¹⁶ Consequently, the Torah should be taught with a Good Eye.

In another passage,¹⁷ the proof-text that Moses had a Good Eye when he shared the Torah with Israel is Prov. 22:9, which says: "He that has a Good Eye shall be blessed (*yevorakh*), for he gives of his bread to the poor." This is a typical midrashic exegesis, in which a scriptural verse is said to refer to a certain person. By using the method of substitution, the man with the *Good Eye* in this verse becomes Moses and the *bread* becomes the Torah. Furthermore, the Hebrew *yevorakh* in Prov. 22:9, according to *al tikri* midrashim (that is, midrashim that change the way a word in Tanakh is to be read by changing the letter(s)), should be read as *yevarekh*, not in the passive sense of "shall be blessed" but, rather, in the active sense of "will bless."¹⁸ The significance of this change of meaning in this word is that a person with a Good Eye has the power to bless others. For example, since Moses had a Good Eye, he was able to give blessings to Israel.¹⁹

In addition to blessing others, the holder of a Good Eye is given the honor of reciting benedictions. R. Yehoshua B. Levi is quoted as saying: "We give the cup of blessing for the Grace After Meals to the one who has a Good Eye."²⁰

Midrashic literature also poses contrasts between the Good Eye and the Evil Eye. For example, the donor who gives the most for *terumah*, a heave offering to the priests, is said to have a Good Eye, whereas the one who gives the least has an Evil Eye.²¹ The text in question has a perplexing phrase, namely, "A man's eye is good, but a woman's eye is evil." This comment may not be as outrageous as it initially reads. In the context of this passage, a male head of the household made a feast for his son and was required to give one twenty-fourth of the dough to the priests for a heave offering. In contrast, a woman who prepared bread for commercial purposes was obliged to give only one forty-eighth of the dough as a heave offering. Since the offering of the male was more generous than that of the female, he was considered to have a Good Eye, while the female was deemed to have an Evil Eye.

In rabbinic literature, women have been mentioned in respect to the Evil Eye as well as the Good Eye. The destructive power of a woman's Evil Eye is illustrated in a midrash concerning Sarah and Hagar. In

16. *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, Zot ha-Berakhah* (Buber ed., p. 196b).

17. Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 38a.

18. *Midrash Tanhuma, Ve-zot ha-Berakhah* 1 (Buber ed., p. 27b).

19. *Ibid.*

20. Babylonian Talmud, *Sota* 38b.

21. *Sifré Bamidbar, Shelah* 110 (p. 115).

one midrash, Sarah's Evil Eye caused Hagar to have a miscarriage.²² After this miscarriage, Hagar was impregnated a second time by Abraham. In a second midrash, Sarah again called upon her Evil Eye.²³ This time it was able to inflict intense fever and desperate thirst upon Ishmael while he was lost in the desert.

And he (Abraham) took bread and a bottle of water" (Gen. 21:14). This is the custom of slaves: they carry water in their pitchers. "*He put it on her shoulder and the child*" (ibid.) who was seventeen (*Bereshit Rabbah*: twenty-seven) years old. And you say: *Putting it on her shoulder and the child?*! This teaches that Sarah cast an Evil Eye upon him. This is the reason that he (Ishmael) fell sick. And she set a fever and stomach-cramps unto him. Know that this is what Scripture says: "*And the water was spent*" (21:15) — from the fever. This is the way of the sick, they drink frequently. "*And she cast the child under one of the shrubs (sihim)*" (ibid.), for the ... shrubs usually grow in the desert and in these bushes the ministering angels spoke (*hesihu*) to her"²⁴

Another example of a woman using her Evil Eye is found in a midrash concerning Queen Esther, who used her Evil Eye to make the king jealous of her and Haman, in order to enrage the king so that he would kill both Haman and Esther. It is implied from the text that the death of Haman and the sacrificial death of Esther would result in the saving of the Jewish people.

All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, man or woman ... " (Esth. 4:11). In the Gemara it is taught: Three ministering angels were appointed to help her (Esther) at that moment; one to draw a thread of grace over her, a second to make her neck erect, and a third to stretch the golden sceptre. How much was it stretched? It was two cubits long and he made it twelve cubits long.

The Sages taught: "What is your petition and it will be granted to you" (Esth. 5:6). [To this question of the king] Esther said: "Let the king and Haman come unto the banquet" (5:4). She said: "I will cast an Evil Eye upon the king that he will be jealous with me and Haman. And he will kill us and I will not see the suffering of Israel."

Another interpretation: "Let us invite Haman so that he falls into my hands," because a wise man says: "If your enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink. For you shall heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward you" (Prov. 25:21f.). Do not read "and the Lord shall reward you" but "and the Lord will surrender him to you." (Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 15b). R. Elazar said: "She set a trap for him, as it says: 'Let their table before them become a snare'" (Ps. 69:23).²⁵

In rabbinic literature, women have been contrasted to men in respect to the Evil Eye, and are thought to have a greater capacity than

22. Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 45:5.

23. Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 53:13 (somewhat parallel to *Yalkut Shim'oni*, Gen. 94).

24. Ibid.

25. Midrash *Megilah* (*Ozar Midrashim*, p. 60b) and somewhat parallel in Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 15b.

men to inflict harm with it.²⁶ Furthermore, the superior power of women is asserted in one rabbinic source, which states that the Evil Eye can be avoided if one has a daughter before a son. In this text, R. Hisda said: "A daughter first born is a good sign for the children. Some say, because the Evil Eye has no influence over them."²⁷ A possible explanation for this passage is that if the first born child is a male he could be envied for his superior inheritance rights. This would not be the case if the first born child is a female. As stated earlier, envy activates the Evil Eye.

In respect to the Good Eye, women have also been given a special status. For example, on a festival day, men who are bakers are not permitted to measure flour for the dough that they will bake. In contrast, the Good Eye of women grants them the right even on a festival day to measure flour and to separate *hallah* for the priestly share.²⁸

Since the potential harm of the Evil Eye was an ever-present danger for the rabbis, they sought out methods of protection. The main question was: How could the effect of the Evil Eye be avoided? Before this question is addressed, one should keep in mind the general rabbinic objection to magic, based on Exod. 22:17 and Deut. 18:10-11. Furthermore, the rabbis adopted the position that the Jewish people should not engage in secret and esoteric practices, because they feared that the practices of idolatrous nations would enter Judaism. Unlike Jewish folk belief, the rabbis did not rely upon amulets to counter the Evil Eye, although the wearing of amulets was not prohibited.

The opposition to wearing amulets on Shabbat can be found in the Talmud, where we read: "She may not go out with *totefet*. What is *totefet*? R. Yosef said: "*Humrata de-ketifata*, a charm containing balsam."²⁹ It seems from this passage that *totefet* in this context is an ornament or frontlet worn on the forehead; Rashi explained it as certain knots to ward off the Evil Eye. The expression *totefet* is the same word as *totafot*, phylacteries. It is prohibited to carry phylacteries or amulets which are encased in leather outside on the Shabbat. Generally, amulets are permitted on the Shabbat if they are prepared by an expert. A prohibited device against the Evil Eye was the fox tail worn by an animal on Shabbat; in *Shabbat* 53a we read: "A horse must not be led out with

26. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Mezia* 87a.

27. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 141a.

28. Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Mezia* 29a.

29. The translation is not quite accurate; the charm could contain (red) coral pieces or (blue) beads which are still used as pendants against the Evil Eye. The more important aspect of these *totafot* seems to be that they were worn between the eyes of a woman, as was the fox tail between the eyes of an animal. They would attract the first glance of a harmful person and thus avert the Evil Eye. L. Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Budapest, 1898), p. 166, mentions that a reddish amulet that is worn between the eyes could avert possible harm.

a fox's tail." According to Rashi, a fox tail was suspended between the horse's eyes to defend against the Evil Eye.

One tolerated method of obtaining protection against the Evil Eye is by calling a person by a different name. For example, a beautiful woman may be called a *kushit* (an Ethiopian) in order to protect her from the Evil Eye. In *Midrash Tanhuma*,³⁰ it is contended that this is the reason why the wife of Moses is called *kushit*.³¹

Another acceptable protection against the Evil Eye was the recitation of the name of God and of certain scriptural quotations. An illustration of this phenomenon is found in *Midrash Ruth, Zohar Hadash*.³² In this text, there is a statement that if a man passes between two menstruating women he will be subjecting himself to witchcraft and placing his life in jeopardy. This passage clearly reflects a text in the Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 111a. However, the *Zohar Hadash* text mentions another case. Even if the women are not menstruating, their Evil Eye will nevertheless prevail over the man. Following this statement, there is a narrative passage which relates a story about R. Nahum, who walks between two women in the city of Caesarea. They look upon him and he is immediately harmed. The suggested remedy in such cases is the recitation of a scriptural passage that commences and ends with the word *El*, God.³³ In addition, one also recites a spell: "*Zil, zil, domi, domi, a'adi ketor dekatara, lo (lakh) lo li*. [Go, go, be quiet, be quiet, untie the knot which is not tied (for you) and not for me]."³⁴ This spell is comparable to the Talmudic spell which mentions the names of demons.³⁵ In the *Zohar*, the Evil Eye is juxtaposed to witchcraft. Both witchcraft and the Evil Eye are utilized only by women. Both texts have constellations of two against one or one against two persons which constitute a potential danger. Such constellations are part of magic. Additionally, the later text confirms earlier passages indicating that women possess superior powers compared to men in respect to the Evil Eye. Apparently, the Evil Eye in the later text is a magical device. Contrary to the general rabbinic objection to magic, there are remainders of folk belief and magic in the texts:

Our Rabbis taught: There are three who must not pass between two and one may not pass between them. These are: A dog, a palm tree

30. *Midrash Tanhuma, Zav* (printed ed., p. 10a).

31. Num. 12:1.

32. *Zohar Hadash, Midrash Ruth* 81c.

33. Num. 23:22-23.

34. For the emendation of the spell, cf. A. Löwinger, *Op. cit.*, who quotes *Zohar Hadash*, p. 63d [recto 81c]. The request to untie the knot is countermagic. For a useful distinction between magic, miracle, and science, relating to rabbinic texts, see J. Neusner, "Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: The System and the Difference," in J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs and P.V. McCracken Flesher (eds.), *Religion, Science and Magic* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 61-81.

35. Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 111a. The crossroad is a place where magic takes place.

and a woman. Some say: Also a pig. Some say: Also a snake. If one passes between them, what is the remedy? R. Papa said: (One quotes from Scripture) commencing with *El* and ending with *El*.³⁶

Others say: Commencing with *lo* and ending with *lo*.³⁷ If a menstruant woman passes between people, she kills one of them, if it is the beginning of her menses. And if it is at the end of her menses, she will cause a quarrel between them. What is the remedy? Commencing with *El* and ending with *El* (Babylonian Talmud, *Pesaḥim* 111a).

One who passes between menstruant women is affected by witch-craft . . . his life may be placed in jeopardy or he may suffer death. If they are not menstruant, the Evil Eye will prevail over him and his money.

Once R. Naḥum [the son of] Rabbi Simlai passed between two women in the city of Caesarea. They looked at him and he was immediately harmed, affecting his body and his money. What is the reason? Because an evil spirit is in them and they can do harm. What is the remedy? One says: “*Zil, zil, domi, domi, a’adi ketor deketara lo, lo li.*” And after this, he commences with *El* and ends with *El* (*Midrash Ruth*, *Zohar Ḥadash* 81c).

If two women are sitting at a cross-road, one on one side and one on the other side, facing each other, they are certainly engaged in witch-craft.

What is the remedy? If there is another road, one uses that road. If there is no other road and if there is another man, the two men hold hands and pass through. If there is no other man, one says: “*Igeret, Izlat, Ayya, Belusya* have been slain with arrows” (Babylonian Talmud, *Pesaḥim* 111a).

There were some people who did not need any protection against the Evil Eye because it was powerless over them. The rabbis believed that Joseph and his descendants were insulated from any harm from the Evil Eye. This is explained in a midrash on Gen. 49:22, in which the word *ayin*, as used in Jacob’s blessing of Joseph, “Joseph is a fruitful bough . . . by a well (*ayin*), is interpreted as meaning “eye” rather than “well” (Gen. 49:22). One of the variants of this midrash is found in the Talmud, which has an anecdote about R. Yoḥanan, who claimed to be a descendant of Joseph.

R. Yoḥanan used to go and sit at the gate of the ritual bath. “When the daughters of Israel ascend from the bath let them meet me first, that they may bear sons as beautiful and as learned as I” The rabbis said to him: “Do you not fear an Evil Eye when you expose yourself to be seen?” He said to them: “I am of the seed of Joseph, against whom an Evil Eye is powerless. It is written: Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well (*ayin*).” . . . R. Abahu said: “Do not read ‘by a well’ but ‘above the power of the Eye.’” R. Yose b. R. Hanina said

36. Rashi: Num. 23:22-23.

37. Rashi: Num. 23:19; *Tosafot*: Ps. 27:9; Ps. 17:8 (“Keep me as the apple of your eye”). The *Tosafot* cite a prayer by R. Hananel which begins and ends with *El*. L. Blau, *Op. cit.*, p. 70, suggests that only Num. 23:22-23 was intended. If read backwards — a usual magical practice — the Hebrew would begin and end with *lo*. It should be noted that *Lo Lo*, read as proper nouns, could be the names of idols.

it from the following: “‘Multiply abundantly like fish in the midst of the earth’ (Gen. 48:16). Just as fish in the sea are covered by water and the Eye has no power over them, so also the seed of Joseph — the Eye has no power over them.”³⁸

The words of Gen. 49:22 are somewhat obscure; however, the verse itself is protective against the Evil Eye. If, upon entering a new town, one fears the Evil Eye, one can seek protection by declaring to be of Joseph’s seed and reciting the following:

I, so-and-so, am of the seed of Joseph over which the Evil Eye has no power, as it says: “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well” (Gen. 49:22).³⁹

Not only is Joseph himself protected, but he can also protect others from the Evil Eye. In a midrash⁴⁰ we are told that Joseph protected Rachel from the Eye of Esau. The midrash explains the odd sequence in which certain of Jacob’s family are mentioned (Gen. 33:7) as they are being introduced to Esau, “And after came Joseph near, and Rachel,” in the following way:

Joseph said: “The wicked man has an aspiring Eye, let him not look at my mother” . . . At this moment Joseph drew himself up to his full height and covered her.

The scriptural verse mentions Joseph before his mother, which the midrash reads as Joseph protecting her from the Evil Eye. Others mentioned in regard to having protective powers against the Evil Eye are the members of the tribe of Benjamin and, in certain aspects, Rachel herself.⁴¹

Very pious people are naturally protected from the effects of the Evil Eye because their conception, their birth, and their acts are so miraculous that they are set apart from other human beings in many aspects of human existence. Whereas it was generally believed that the Evil Eye can affect a newborn child, these pious ones are protected from infancy without wearing amulets. In a legendary account, the unborn child, Ben Sira, talks to his mother while she is in labour. He explains to her the circumstances of his conception and the reason why he is comparable to his father, Jeremiah, by quoting from Scripture. In this process his mother admonishes him: “Son, do not speak, so that the Evil Eye may have no power over you.” His reply is: “The Evil Eye has no power over me.” When the child grows up he becomes a sage.⁴²

38. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Mezia 84a (see also *Berakhot* 20a).

39. Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 55b.

40. *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 78:10.

41. *Zohar* III, 202b.

42. *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* (*Ozar Midrashim*, p. 44a), which is a late text, as has been pointed out by G. Scholem, *Die Jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), p. 94, calling it “*spätes Volksbuch*.”

Another scriptural passage that serves as a protection against the Evil Eye is the *birkat ha-kohanim*, the priestly blessing, “The Lord bless you and keep you . . . ” etc. (Num. 6:24-26). This priestly blessing precedes the verse in the Torah which states, in part: And it came to pass “on the *kallot* day” (Num. 7:1). (This is the literal translation of the phrase, which means “on the day [that Moses] completed [the building of the Tabernacle]). *Pesikta Rabbati* interprets the phrase “*kallot* day” as the “nuptial day” of God and Israel, by reading “*kallot*” as “bride” (*kallah*) instead of “completed.” With this premise, a parable is told treating God as King, and Israel as daughter.

(A parable of) a king who betrothed his daughter and made great festivities for her betrothal. An Evil Eye, however, prevailed over all. When the king went to give his daughter in marriage, what did he do? He gave her an amulet and spoke to her: “Wear this amulet that the Evil Eye my no longer prevail over you.”⁴³

In the midrash utilizing this parable, the first time that God gave the Torah to Israel is analogous to the “betrothal” in the parable. However, the Evil Eye prevailed over Israel and, consequently, the first set of Tablets was broken. This event takes place in Ex. 32. By the time that the Tabernacle is completed, as stated in Num. 7:1, God has given Israel protection against the Evil Eye. This protection is the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24-26) that precedes the verse that mentions that the Tabernacle is completed (Num. 7:1).

The Evil Eye and the Good Eye obviously had a profound influence upon the rabbinic mindset. It appears that, in a substantial portion of their literature, the rabbis acknowledged the existence of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye as devices to explain, in part, the reality that they encountered, as well as the scriptural passages that they interpreted. The Evil Eye was an *explicans* for occurrences outside of their religious experience.

43. *Pesikta Rabbati* 5 (Friedmann ed., p. 21b); *Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:4.

Three Gates Tehinno: A Seventeenth Century Yiddish Prayer*

by SARAH BAS TOVIM

Translated by NORMAN TARNOR

Translator's Introduction

LITTLE IS KNOWN OF SARAH BAS TOVIM, AUTHOR of the *Three Gates Tehinno*. She was the daughter of a Rabbi Mordecai who was, in turn, the grandson of another Rabbi Mordecai. The grandfather in his time had been head of the ecclesiastical court of the Brisk (Brest-Litovsk) congregation. Brisk had been a large Jewish commercial center for generations. It was also a center for Jewish studies and one of the founding communities of the Council of Lithuania. It was no mean achievement for a rabbi to rise to prominence in the ecclesiastical court of such a community. A descendant of this rabbinical family was, therefore, a member of the local Jewish religious aristocracy of the time.

The family aristocracy was not destined to be continued through Sarah. It has been inferred, on the basis of a passage in the collection of *tehinnot* called *Sheker ha-Hayn*, that she was childless, based on her statement, "... may it be for a memorial after my death," quoted by Israel Zinberg in *A History of Jewish Literature*.¹ There is also evidence that she grew up in a well-to-do household, youthfully vain in her love of jewelry and finery. In old age she was impoverished, and wandered from community to community.

The name *Bas Tovim* (Daughter of Good Ones) seems to have been adopted as a *nom de plume*, to indicate her distinguished ancestry. M. Starkman² conjectures that *Tovim* might have been the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin *virī boni* (provincial elders, like *parnassey medinah*), persons who conducted daily communal affairs of the Jewish community, and well-to-do in the sense of being "burghers" of the Jewish community — householders — members of what might today be called upper middle

* I have chosen to transliterate the author's words in a Yiddish style, rather than the way Hebrew would be rendered, to reflect the plan of the original text and its Ashkenazi pronunciation by the author of the prayers (*tehinnot*).

1. Vol. 7, B. Martin, tr. (N.Y.: 1975), p. 255. Although the *tehinnot* themselves were written to be recited by other women, they frequently refer to "my children."

2. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Pub. House, 1972), 4, 318.

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class, people cognizant of the obligation and responsibility to render services on behalf of the community.

As a member with family *yihus* (genealogical status), in addition to being a rabbi's wife, Sarah was probably literate. Her text frequently indicates that she was well versed in Tanakh and Midrash, not just as these appeared in print but also via oral transmission. She lived in a pre-modern age, which lacked such diversions and attractions as radio and television. The printed book, though hard to come by and costly in her time, probably was a primary vehicle for learning and inspiration, in addition to oral transmission.

The title, "*Three Gates Tehinno*,"³ is a bit misleading. The plural form should have been used — *Tehinnos*, because each gate contains a different *tehinna* (the Hebrew form of *tehinno*). According to Sarah's preface:

The First Gate is based upon the three *mizvos* which we women are obligated to fulfill, the acronym of which is the three-lettered Hebrew word, *Ha-nof[h]* (*Hannah*), which is the abbreviation for: *hallo* ([setting aside and burning a portion of the] Sabbath bread), *niddo* (concerning menstruation), and *hadlo-kas ner* (candle-lighting for Sabbath and festivals).⁴ The Second Gate is a *tehinna* for the new month [*Rosh Hodesh Benshen*].⁵ The Third Gate is for the Days of Awe [*Yomim No-ro-im*].⁶

3. The Hebrew word for "gate" is *sha-ar* (plu.: *she-o-rim*). The Hebrew word has many meanings, among which is found "gate" when used in the sense of a chapter, as in a book, or a division or section of one. In Aramaic it is used in the Talmud to refer to "tractate," a large section or division of an even larger unit. In his introduction to the tractate *Nezikin* (Damages), the editor of the Soncino English translation of the Babylonian Talmud states that the fourth Order of the Talmud, *Nezikin*, was divided into, and referred to, as "Three Gates," the First Gate, the Middle Gate, and the Last Gate, because of the excessive length of the original single tractate. The use of "gate" in the sense that Sarah Bas Tovim used it has a long history — one that would not escape the attention of a Jew raised in the world of the *yeshivah*, or of his wife, for that matter.

4. Obligation for the fulfillment of these *mizvot* is found in the Mishnah, *Shabbat* 2,6 — "For three transgressions do women die in childbirth: for heedlessness of the laws of the menstruant, the dough-offering, and the lighting of the [Sabbath] lamp." *The Mishnah*, H. Danby, tr. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), p. 102.

It is worth noting that the *niddo* section doesn't really qualify as a *tehinna*, a supplicatory prayer. There is, for example, no blessing to be recited, as there is over Sabbath candles or in taking of *halla*. Nor is there a direct appeal to God for His approval, sanction or support. We seem to have here the beginning of a discourse on the subject of *nidda* and its importance for the Jewish woman — a discourse which, in later editions, gradually expanded and evolved until it acquired the dimensions of a full-length chapter in the 1922 Vilna edition. Only in the final paragraph is there a brief, prayerful hope that Mother Hannah's merit will protect the daughters of Israel who observe the law of *nidda*.

5. Gate One was the only one clearly indicated by large, bold-face type and set off from the text. Indications signifying the beginning of the second and third gates were made by the translator. The reason for the absence of the second and third gate is unclear. It may be due to the fact that, while the text is continuous from page to page, pagination is confusing. Perhaps the printer (redactor?) used more than one edition and "cut and pasted." The bottom-line consideration probably was a financial one.

6. Based on text found in the *tehinna* collection of *Seder Tehinnos U-va-ko-shos* (Vilna: J.R. Romm Pub., 1860), in which Sarah's collection was included with a publication year

The most interesting *tehinno* is the second one. In the prayer for the New Month, Sarah's religious inspiration soars. Generally, prayers in Judaism are directed to God. There have rarely been intermediaries; in the Jewish tradition, a Jew speaks directly to his Creator but, in this instance, Sarah addresses her ancestors among the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and urges them to rise from their graves and intercede on behalf of their descendants. She instructs them in what to say to God, what to remind Him of, so that He will exercise His quality of compassion upon the living, suffering descendants. She also calls upon Moses and the King Messiah to intercede on behalf of the Children of Israel.

In Paradise there are certain rooms or chambers occupied by various personalities well known in Jewish tradition. Their function is to praise God but, in addition, they must petition Him on behalf of the suffering descendants living today. Hope is expressed by Sarah that, in the time-to-come, God and the King Messiah will lead the faithful back to Zion.

Why did this apparently unique passage on Paradise come to be composed in Yiddish? What most likely was uppermost in Sarah's mind was to have it read and understood in vernacular Yiddish by the Jewish masses. Her purpose was at once practical and sensible. In an entirely different context, Geoffrey H. Hartman appears to support such a line of reasoning.⁷ Dante, he says, called his poem a "Comedy" because "it was written in the vernacular and made use of low-style expressions restricted to the . . . realm of popular art In more strictly literary terms, what the divine comedy of art does is to save the *mammalashon*" (sic!). He then finds this idea of *mammalashon* expressed in Thoreau's chapter, "Reading," in *Walden* as being " . . . learned unconsciously, like the brutes, of our mothers . . . whereas the 'father' tongue is a reserved and select expression . . . which we must be born again in order to speak." This being "born again," according to Hartman, is Thoreau's introduction of theology. A similar process seems to have taken place in Yiddish prayer: significant quantities of prayers, or sections of them, found in the Tanakh and post-Tanakh literature, have been absorbed by the Yiddish vernacular, and those religious elements, in turn, introduced into *tehinnot*.

An interesting feature of this *mammalashon* literature-liturgy is highlighted in the present translation by bracketed material, the purpose of which is to reflect the presence in a *tehinna* of a Hebrew passage, phrase, or clause. Brackets are also used to insert a clarifying word or phrase that is missing from the original text. Whether using a Biblical verse, theological or ethical concept, Sarah blended Hebrew into her text so naturally that one is hardly aware of two languages. This is neither unique nor an

of 1859. However, *Encyclopedia Judaica* 4, 318, has a photograph of the first page, and, underneath it, an earlier date of 1838. The *EJ* article places her in the 17th century. A number of other printings is known to exist. The "Three Gates" seems to have been relatively popular.

7. *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), p. 144.

original practice by Sarah. One suspects that many Jews in those days, confronted with the idea that they were using Hebrew, might even have been surprised, having thought all along that it was Yiddish they were speaking and thinking.

Unlike Dante, with some of whose scenes Sarah's beg comparison, Sarah never questions the significance of what she envisions. Her daytime visions are simply and directly presented to her pious women readers. Dante's illumination, by contrast, is a nighttime dream-vision. He sees through a poet's eyes. Sarah is no Dante, however stimulating and inspiring her prose art may be. Dante's feeling, writes John Freccero (in his introduction to John Ciardi's translation of the *Inferno*), is one of "poetic inadequacy for the ultimate experience" of being in Paradise. This "poetic inadequacy" is absent from her *tehinnot* because the experience of being in Paradise is not, after all, the purpose of this humble rabbi's wife. Rather than offering some sort of Cook's tour of the place "up there," Sarah seeks only to persuade God to save and deliver His people. The sense of the medieval understanding of Paradise and the sense of an ultimate reality are absent from Sarah's prayer for the New Month. The ultimate reality for Dante was a great spiritual love that moved sun and stars, a love that saved elected individual souls and enabled them to return to their Maker. In Sarah's *tehinna*, within the normative stream of traditional Judaism, there is, instead, an overriding concern for the group, for *Klal Yisroel*, all of the Children of Israel, and their ultimate collective redemption. It is a moving, sensitive yearning, which expresses the grass roots hopes and dreams of the Jewish people collectively. Viewed thus, Sarah achieved a trans-temporal significance beyond time and place.

There are some minor problems. In her prayer for the New Month, for example, Rebbetzin Sarah speaks of six women's chambers in Paradise, yet she describes only four. What happened to the other two? It seems unlikely that she would deliberately neglect to describe them. Were they lost in the many reprints that the *tehinnot* underwent? Could some anonymous printer or owner of a press carelessly have torn out the wrong number of pages from an earlier printing? Also, in speaking of the chambers as indescribable, Sarah notes that "No one is admitted." So, how did she get in? How did she know what went on there? The fact is that Sarah was not the creator of this women's paradise. Professor Chava Weissler⁸ has located its origin in the Zohar, noting perceptively that the Zohar's influence

was widespread in 17th and 18th century Yiddish literature The early part of this period . . . was a time of the popularization of Jewish mysticism, a phenomenon which made new visions of the religious life available to those outside the learned elite — women and unlearned men.

8. "Women in Paradise," *Tikkun*, April-May, 1987, vol. 2, no. 2: 43ff.

(In a conversation with Professor Weissler, I subsequently learned that the Zohar passage also dealt with only four chambers).*

The text used as a basis for this translation was found inserted in a collection of *Tehinnot* printed in Vilna, 1860. The inserted *Three Gates Tehinno*, however, has the year 1859 appended to it. The volume was located in the University of California at Los Angeles Library Annex, uncataloged at the time, with the call number 2103928. I am indebted to Dr. Shimon Brisman, the Jewish Bibliographer, for his kind help in locating the item as well as for several illuminating comments and suggestions.

Introduction to the Three Gates Tehinno

I, Sarah Bas Tovim, do this for the sake of beloved God, blessed be He and blessed be His name, and compose another beautiful *tehinno* in three gates in Yiddish [*oif teitsch*] with great love, fear and trepidation, with contrite limbs, prayerfully, and with reliance upon the merits of our Matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah). May they entreat God on my behalf. May the fact that I have been a wanderer be atonement for my sins. And may the blessed Name forgive me for having chattered in synagogue [*shul*] in my youth at the time when the beloved Torah was being read.

Master of the whole world, heed my prayer as I am about to arrange my beautiful new *tehinno* with complete concentration [*kavono*] and with all my heart. Protect us from pain and suffering. Be compassionate toward Your people as You were toward our Fathers and Mothers. Remember our Father Abraham as he grasped his son Isaac by the throat with his left hand, the slaughterer's knife in his right, prepared to sacrifice his son out of love for You, stifling his paternal compassion. In like manner, restrain Your anger. I beseech heaven and earth and all the holy angels to entreat on behalf of my two (sic!) *tehinnos*, that they be found acceptable to become a crown for His holy Name. Amen [*O-mayn*].

Gate One

Hallo

Women were commanded to fulfill three *mizvos* (Sabbath bread, etc.) ["The first of your dough you shall set apart as a gift . . ." — Num. 15:20]. The meaning [*teitsch*] of the verse is that you shall set aside a first portion of your [baking] dough for the purpose of observing the *mizvo*

* However, sometime after this conversation with Professor Weissler, I was led to another source of women in Paradise by David Harari in his Hebrew article appearing in *Italia*, "Le tracce del 'Quarto Dialogo smarrito' de Leone Ebreo negli 'Eroici Furorici di Giordano Bruno,'" vol. vii, nos. 1-2 (1988): 143 — tractate *Derekh Erez Zuta*, end of chapter one, p. 570, Soncino trans. "There were nine who entered the Garden of Eden alive, viz.: Enoch the son of Yered . . . Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, and Serah the daughter of Asher"

of *hallo* (the commandment of the Sabbath bread), by merit of which God will fill your granaries,⁹ meaning that, by virtue of observing the *mizvo* of *hallo*, God, blessed be He and blessed be His Name, will bless your granaries unfailingly so that they will be full.

In former times the Priest used to accept the priestly tithe on produce [*terumo*]; also, the Levite received the tithe [*ma-aser*] and the poor man got the poor man's tithe [*ma-aser o-nee*]; finally, there was also for people the second tithe [*ma-aser sheni*] (consumed by the owner in Jerusalem). But nowadays, since the Holy Temple was destroyed because of our many sins, all has been nullified except for the *mizvo* of *hallo*. Therefore, Lord of the universe [*Ribbono shel olom*], we ask that You accept the *mizvo* of *hallo* and send us great blessing in our wanderings and do not let our children become estranged [from our religious tradition]. Enable my husband and me to support them by ourselves throughout a long life. May the *mizvo* of *hallo* be acceptable to You as though we were fulfilling all 613 commandments [*mizvos*].

Niddo

"God accepts all the inward parts" — Prov. 20:22. This means [*teitsch*] that God, blessed be He, searches all the inner chambers of the [woman's] abdomen.¹⁰ If you keep the commandments regarding the menstrual period, when a Jewish woman removes herself from physical contact with her husband (hereafter, "the *mizvo* of *niddo*"), He will protect your children from the fatal illnesses of diphtheria and dropsy (edema) . . . The meaning is that if you take care to observe constantly the *mizvo* of *niddo*, God, blessed be He, will take care of your children and spare them from fatal illnesses. "A garden shut up is my sister, my bride . . ." — Songs 4:12, meaning my sister (i.e., wife) is as a locked garden.¹¹

God is proud of women who separate themselves from their hus-

9. I have been unable to locate such a Biblical passage. The only thing that comes close is Prov. 8:21 " . . . I will fill their treasuries" as a reward to them that love God.

10. The phrase *ho-face kol hadray betten* is translated by Birnbaum in his *High Holiday Prayer Book (HHPB)* as: "Thou dost search all the inmost chambers of man's conscience . . ." and by Bokser in his *High Holiday Prayer Book* as: "Thou searchest out our innermost secrets . . ." It is found in the Mahzor in the paragraph immediately preceding what Bokser calls the Long Confession (*al het*), appearing a number of times in the Yom Kippur services. The paragraph in which it is found recognizes the fact that nothing is hidden from God. This is a small departure from what seems to have been the basic thrust of the Proverbs verse, in which the spirit or soul of man is "a Divine light illuminating all the *inward parts* . . ." (footnote, Soncino edition of Prov., p. 137). Sarah Bas Tovim, in her *tehinna*, connected the phrase to a woman's belly or, more delicately, her abdomen. The metaphor is fittingly applied not only to a woman's anatomy but also to her feminine psyche, using a rather down-to-earth term, the relevance of which was probably not lost upon Sarah Bas Tovim's Jewish women readers.

11. This is the prooftext to show that a husband may not have intercourse with his menstruating wife.

bands earlier than is required (one *onah* prior to her menstruation).¹² If she is correct in her calculation regarding her period, she must not come in [physical] contact with her husband. This rule was established as a precautionary measure for women so that they would be able to avoid violating the actual prohibition. Since the average woman is unfamiliar with the laws of menstruation, many could stumble and be misled; for this reason we have included the law here so that they will be alerted to it. As a reward for observing the law, they will have good, religious and wise sons. They will also receive the reward of the world-to-come.

May the merit of our Mother *Hannah* protect their daughters, that they may properly observe the commandments, especially the *mizvo* of *niddo*. May they not esteem it lightly, so that when they give birth they will not be punished, and their lying-in will be quick and of short duration.

Had-lokas Ner

In honor of God, in honor of our commandment, [i.e.], in honor of the beloved, holy Sabbath [*Shabbos*] which our Lord God has given us, [I pray] that I shall be able to fulfill the commandment [of lighting the Sabbath candles] properly, and that it be regarded as equal in importance to the 613 commandments of Israel. Amen.

Lord of the world, may my [performance of the] commandment of candle lighting be as acceptable as the high priest's . . . when he kindled lights in the Holy Temple, as it is written: "Your word is a light [candle] for my feet and a light for my path," Ps. 119:105. This means [*teitsch*]: May Your words [teachings] illuminate the way for my feet so that they will proceed along life's way [successfully]; may . . . my candle lighting be acceptable [to You] so that my children's eyes will be illuminated by the Torah.

I pray also that beloved God, blessed be He, will accept favorably my *mizvo* of candle lighting as was the olive oil which burned continuously in the Holy Temple.

May the merit of the beloved *Shabbos* candles protect us as the beloved *Shabbos* protected Adam from a quick death.¹³ So may our merit of the

12. Authority for this is found in B. *Shabuoth* 18b (Soncino, p. 93): "Our Rabbis taught: *Thus shall you separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness.* [The proof-text is in Lev. 18:19.] R. Josiah said: 'From this we deduce a warning to the children of Israel that they should separate from their wives near their periods.' And how long? Rabbah said: 'One *onah*.'" See footnote *ad loc.*, defining *onah* as "a period of time (with special reference to marital duty): the whole day or the whole night . . ."

13. "For Adam the Sabbath had a peculiar significance. When he was made to depart out of Paradise in the twilight of the Sabbath eve, the angels called after him, 'Adam did not abide in His glory overnight!' Then the Sabbath appeared before God as Adam's defender, and spoke: 'O Lord of the world! During the six working days no creature was slain. If Thou wilt begin now by slaying Adam, what will become of the sanctity and the blessing of the Sabbath?' In this way Adam was rescued from the fires of hell,

candles which we have lit protect our children's candles [of life], that they may be illumined in the [study of] Torah. May their candles illuminate the heavens, and may our performance of the commandments be as acceptable as [the performance by] our Forefathers and Mothers and the holy tribes [of Israel]. May we be as pure as a newborn child, fresh out of its mother's womb. Amen.

Gate Two

Rosh Hodesh Benshen
(Prayer for the New Month)

Look down upon Your holy congregation as they stand in prayer with contrite hearts, wrapped in emotional and spiritual intensity. Heed their plea. Great is Your loving kindness, though our sins cover us like a cloud. Scatter them, strengthen and blend Your mercy with Your Thirteen Attributes. Cause them to shine brightly, and accept our prayers together with those of our ancestors on the threshold of the New Month [*erev Rosh Hodesh*]. May they be as a crown for You, O King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

Arise, our ancestors, from your graves and go to the Throne of Compassion to plead for us. Arise, stand up, Abraham, before God and say to Him: "Remember the covenant of the parts [*bris bayn ha-b'sorim*, Gen. 15:9-21], that my children would be as many as the stars in the sky [Gen. 15:5]. Dear God, have mercy upon the Children of Israel. When they have sinned and should be punished by fire,¹⁴ remember that I willingly allowed myself to be cast into the fiery furnace¹⁵ for the sake of Your holy Name, to die for sanctification of the Name" [*kiddush ha-Shem*].

Arise, stand up, Isaac, you who were bound upon the altar, and plead for us: "Remember that I would have allowed myself to be slaughtered upon the altar. May it be considered as a merit [*z'khus*] for my children (descendants) who deserve execution."

Arise, stand up, Jacob, and plead your case (on our behalf) before God and say: "I sacrificed myself for them."¹⁶ If they have sinned, remember my pain and sorrows. I had to leave my father's house and endure the heat of day and cold of night."

the mete punishment for his sins . . . " Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (1909; rpt. Phila.: JPS, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 85-86.

14. "The court had the power to inflict four kinds of death-penalty: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangling." Mishnah *Sanhedrin*, 7:1; Danby, *The Mishnah*, p. 391; B. *Sandedrin* 49b. Sarah's familiarity with the four kinds of death penalty is not based upon the Mishnah source but, in all probability, in the way it appears in the *al het* mentioned above in Bokser's "Long Confession" (footnote 10).

15. B. *Pesahim* 118a (Soncino, p. 609).

16. Sarah doesn't specify Jacob's self-sacrificing deeds, the merit of which constitute his argument in favor and defense of his descendants. A later, anonymous writer has added that this self-sacrifice consisted of Jacob's "suffering exile (from Canaan) for twenty-two years." *Shas Tehinno Rav Peninim* (N.Y.: Hebrew Pub. Co., 1916), p. 59.

Arise, stand up, Moses our Teacher [*Moshe Rabbeinu*], and plead with God. They cannot bear [the suffering]. I beg of you, truthful prophet, who defended the Israelites in the wilderness. When they sinned, you averted God's burning wrath so that they would not be destroyed. Arise now and beg Him not to destroy your people whom you brought out of Egypt with many wonders before the eyes of the nations, and say: "Remember, dear God, that I went ahead of them [to see to it that] no enemy strike and destroy them. Behold them, God, and remember the vine You planted with Your hands."

Arise, stand up, King Messiah, and cry out: "You have broken their walls and allowed plunderers to destroy the [once strong] state. The plunderers went unpunished, and Your throne was cast down to earth. Gladly would I suffer all, to atone for Israel's sins. Do not turn away from their wretchedness, and may Your rule extend over all the world . . .

Man's life and death are in Your hands . . . You, beloved God, raise up man or cast him down when he fails to go in the right path. You bring him pain and healing. In Your relationship with man, guide Yourself by the Thirteen Attributes" [of mercy, etc.].¹⁷

May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to renew unto us this coming month for good and for blessing [*Ye'hi ro-zon mil-fone-kho*, etc.].¹⁸ and grant us long life, a life of peace, of good, of blessing, of good sustenance with happiness [*naḥas*] and without sorrow, of bodily health, that our bodies be strengthened, a life in which there is fear of Heaven and dread of sin, and our children continue to believe in God, blessed be He, to walk in His paths, a life free from shame and reproach so that I shall not be shamed, neither in this world nor in the world-to-come before the Court on High. Grant us a life of prosperity and honor, that we may be able to raise our children in the study of Torah, to bring them under the marriage canopy [*huppo*] and perform good deeds [*ma-asim tovim*]. As King David, may he rest in peace, prayed to the Lord of the universe: "Let me die with dignity and not as a pauper." Grant us a life in which there will be love of Torah and fear of Heaven, in which my children will believe in God, blessed be He, as did Jacob's children.

17. The Thirteen Attributes, enumerating God's nature, originate in Ex. 34:6-7. See Hertz, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* (ADPB), rev. ed. (N.Y.: Bloch Pub. Co., 1948), pp. 477-480; N. Scherman, *The Complete Art Scroll Siddur* (B'klyn., N.Y.: Mesorah Pub., Ltd., 1984), pp. 816-819. The reader will also find there an interesting story on how these verses came to be. Rabbis of the Talmud had a talent for creating living scenes by which to convey their ideas. The passage from B. *Rosh Hashanah* 17b is such an example: God appears to Moses in the form of a cantor to teach him the Thirteen Attributes. Today they are chanted on festivals that occur on weekdays, at the removal of the Torah from the Ark, and on Yom Kippur. Superficial comparison with the text of the prayer reveals how skillfully Sarah Bas Tovim blended it into her *tehinno*.

18. These words begin the *Rosh Hodesh* prayer in the siddur. See Hertz, ADPB, pp. 508-9, for text and footnote. From this point on, the *tehinno* abandons Hebrew and reverts to Yiddish.

As he lay on his death bed, he wanted to reveal to them the final redemption. [But] the spirit of prophecy left him, and he was greatly disturbed. He said: "Perhaps, heaven forbid, there is some [moral] blemish among my children, or a wicked one . . ." To which they all responded: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" ["*Shema Yisroel, etc.*"] Why did they call him Israel? His name was Jacob. Because he went in the ways of Torah and good deeds; therefore, he was called Israel. Grant us a life in which the desires of our heart shall be fulfilled for good. Amen, Selah.

[*Ribbono shel olom*], I pray to You as Queen Esther did. Lord of the entire world, spread Your mercies over me as You have over the world that You created.

In paradise [*Gan Eyden*] there exist six chambers in which dwell thousands of righteous women who never endured the sufferings of Hell [*Gey-hinnom*]. There [in Paradise] is Bithia, daughter of Pharaoh. There, too, is a curtain ready to be used by her to reproduce a picture of Moses, our Teacher [*Moshe Rabbenu*]. She bows and says: "How fortunate am I to have drawn such a liminary [as Moses] from the [Nile's] water, O beloved light!"

Serah, daughter of Asher,¹⁹ is like a queen. Three times daily she calls out: "Behold, here comes the form of Joseph the Righteous One!" She bows and says: "How fortunate am I that I merited being able to tell my Grandfather (Jacob) that my Uncle (Joseph) still lives. In the uppermost chamber he studies [Torah]."

In a third chamber is our Mother, Yokheved, mother of Moses our Teacher, with many [women] praising God, blessed be He, thrice daily, and [they] recite the Song of the Sea with great happiness. There is Miriam the prophetess with drum in hand, saying the verse alone. Many holy angels with her praise the Name, may He be blessed.

In a fourth chamber sits Deborah the prophetess with many thousands of women who praise the Name, may He blessed, and sing The Song [The *Shirah*, i.e., Moses' Song at the Red Sea]. The chambers of the Matriarchs are indescribable. No one is admitted. How great is the pleasure, dear women, when souls are together in Paradise! What pleasure there is! Therefore do I urge you to praise God, blessed be He, with great

19. Serah is one of the lesser known Biblical personalities. Briefly mentioned in the *Tanakh* (Gen. 46:17, Num. 26:46, and 1 Chron. 7:30), it is only later, in aggadic sources, that her personality emerges. Her genealogy is found in L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Phila.: Jewish Pub. Society of America, 1910, rpt. 1946). vol. 2, p. 39. The high esteem in which she was held by Sarah Bas Tovim is based on the fact that Serah was able, through her singing, to inform Jacob that Joseph was alive in Egypt. She did this gently and by degrees in order not to give her aged grandfather a fatal shock. Serah's words re-awakened the prophetic spirit in Jacob, and he informed her that she would not die, but enter Paradise alive (Ginzberg, vol. 2, pp. 115-116). This is the selfsame Serah who now, in Paradise, announces her Uncle Joseph's approach. For other legends about her, see Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son — Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 175.

concentration [*kavono*] and with prayer so that you will be found worthy to be in the presence of our Matriarchs.

Lord of the world, hear my outcry and answer me. Free us this year, for we are as a firstling groaning with pain, like fatherless orphans, like motherless infants. I hope unto the living God, blessed be He, that He will accept my prayer as He accepts all the prayers of those with a heavy and broken heart because of the merit of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. May those who died before their time intercede for us. May the merciful angels also plead for us. When You judge us, do so with compassion and not, heaven forbid, in anger. May my hope not be turned aside from the presence of the Lord of Hosts. You see into all the chambers [of the heart] and examine the thoughts in all hearts. Open, O windows of heaven, and allow the merciful angels to bring my prayer before the Name, may He be blessed. My merciful angel will surely be an advocate [*may-liz*] and bring me favor and mercy [*hayn v'hese*] from the Name, may He be blessed. May the favor of the righteous Joseph and Queen Esther be granted to me this day. How good for the one whose faith is in the Name, blessed be He, for He shames no one who trusts in Him.

Lord of the world [*Ribbono shel olom*], with the same hands with which You created the world, spread Your help over us. May the God who delivered Abraham from the furnace not cast evil upon our children. May He who saved Isaac from being sacrificed upon the altar bless our children fully. May He who saved Jacob from his brother Esau and later from Laban enable us to bless our children with our own hands at the wedding canopy [*huppo*].

In the time-to-come²⁰ the [Holy] Presence [*Shekhino*] will return²¹

20. I.e., at the redemption from exile.

21. There are a number of reasons in Jewish tradition for the *Shekhina's* withdrawal: destruction of the Temple, Israel's exile, slanders, groundless hatred, etc., each of which evolved its own midrashic material.

Sarah is not wandering here. She has kept in mind that this *tehinna* is for *Rosh Hodesh*, on which the *Hallel* (Praise), psalms 113-118, are recited. See, for example, Hertz, *ADPB*, pp. 774-5; Scherman, *Art Scroll Siddur*, pp. 632-642.

In psalm 118:20 we find the relevant verse which begs for midrashic interpretation: "This is the *gate* (emphasis added) of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it." Could this be the gate to which He withdrew after the destruction? Is this the (city) gate through which He will return? Cf. *Art Scroll Siddur*, footnote, p. 640: "This refers to the gate of the Temple. When the exile is over, the righteous will enter through this gate . . ." Cf. also the following in *The International Critical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 406, on verses 18-20:

18. A procession has come up to the gates of the temple, and the chorus speaks in couplets, and a priest responds in couplets.

19. Open to me the gates of *Zedek* . . .

20. To this the priest replies: *This is the gate that belongs to Yahweh*. Only those may enter whom He permits access to His presence, and only *the righteous* people of Israel may enter therein.

There seems to be no definite agreement on what gate is referred to, and where it was located. However, in a colorful passage in *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, trans. Braude and

from the gate to which She has gone. Standing on the Mount of Olives opposite that gate, we shall see that gate exactly as in the verse, "And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives . . ." — Zech. 14:4. " . . . eye to eye they shall see the Lord returning to Zion" — Isa. 52:8 — by way of that same gate. They will stand on that very same holy mountain and see with their own eyes as God returns to Zion and She [the *Shekhino*] will become great. And Jerusalem will be faithful. The Messiah will come quickly, and soon. We shall see and hear miracles. We shall cry out to heaven for the Messiah to prepare himself. He will be crowned with the sacred crown. He will arise!

May I, Sarah, be permitted to behold the joy of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs when that precious time arrives. The holy Zohar writes that Redemption depends only upon repentance and prayer [*teshuvo* and *tefillo*] accompanied by tears which come from the heart. Therefore do I implore you [women] that you pray with great intention [*kavono*] and fear of Heaven [*yir'as Shomayim*]. For prayer without *kavono* is like a body without *neshomo* (soul).

I pray to dear God that my soul return without fear to that place whence it came, beneath the Throne of Glory [*kissay ha-kovod*]. And may the Messiah come quickly in our time. Amen, Selah.

Gate Three

Prayer on Yom Kippur

Lord of the universe [*Ribbono shel olom*], on this day You judge the world with justice. Remember on this day that I have abandoned rebelliousness; incline the scales in my favor. You concern Yourself with the spilled blood of innocents. May it be granted to me on this day to overcome the accuser and silence him with my prayer [*tefillo*].²² Do not allow my light to be extinguished before its time. As You have written: You forgive sins during the Ten Days of Repentance (between Rosh Hã-Shanah and Yom Kippur). During this time, You are favorably inclined to our fervent tears and pleas, since You want to forgive the transgressions we have committed. At this time, You have much compassion for us. Therefore,

Kapstein (Phila.: J.P.S., 1975), p. 480, the Sages say that Solomon expanded upon Isa. 52:7 ("How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, etc.") in his own verse (Song of Songs 1:9), envisioning Israel's eventual redemption when the exiles will be gathered in: "The Presence (a Hebrew term used for God) will walk at the head of them . . ." followed by the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Ark and the Torah; then — all Israel " . . . clothed in majesty, mantled in great glory . . . "

If we bear in mind that Sarah's generation as well as preceding ones were conscious heirs to the religious tradition continuously transmitted by Israel's teachers and preachers, we see that what she says here makes sense and is relevant to the *Rosh Hodesh* theme. 22. The basis for this idea is in a well known *piyyut* (liturgical poem) metaphor composed by Rabbi Yom Tov of York, England (12th c.) found in the following stanza: "Silence the accuser and let the defender be heard . . . " Birnbaum *HHPB*, p. 536; see also footnote, pp. 533-4.

we pray not to be equated with evil; remember not our misdeeds. Permit us to live happily in this world, for You do forgive one's waywardness.

On this day,²³ do not remember my headstrong youth.

On this day, when You judge me, may Your burning wrath be withheld.

On this day, accept my confession with which I beseech You tearfully, and forgive me.

On this day, may I have several speakers on my behalf for life and health.

On this day, dear God, open for me the gate of forgiveness and mercy.

On this day, forgiveness is prepared for man.

On this day, the remission of sins is prepared.

On this day, may there be release from sins that I have committed.

On this day, beloved God, do I repent.

May You act mercifully.

Lord of the universe [*Ribbono shel olom*], on this day accept the menses²⁴ which I have discharged as substitute for the blood and suet²⁵ sprinkled on the altar.

On this day, deal justly with me.

On this day, You examine every heart.

Lord of the universe [*Ribbono shel olom*], on this day may I find favor in Your eyes; I come with bitter heart because of the sins that I have committed, and beg forgiveness.

23. Sarah used this phrase under the influence of the literary phenomenon known as the "refrain." The refrain is frequently found in the High Holy Day liturgy, especially in medieval *piyyutim*. "Probably the very beginnings of poetry are to be found in iterated words and phrases. Refrains occur . . . in the Hebrew psalms . . . they blossom in the medieval ballads . . . Renaissance lyrics, and in the poetry of the romantic period It may be used in such a way that its meaning varies or develops from one recurrence to the next" *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965, rev. ed. 1974), pp. 686-7. In the Mahzor, the example which comes to mind is found in the *piyyut Ha-yom te-am-zay-nu* ("Strengthen Us Today"). Each line begins with *Ha-yom* (Today). See Birnbaum, *HHPB*, p. 405, footnote, end of Rosh Ha-shana Musaf Service; also, Birnbaum, p. 875, end of Yom Kippur Musaf Service. The reverberating presence of "On this day" in Sarah's *tehinno* is intentional. To emphasize this refrain, it has been set off from the text as individual lines. In the Yiddish, everything is jammed together in one large, endless paragraph.

24. "To blood is ascribed in Scripture the mysterious sacredness which belongs to life, and God reserves it to himself when allowing man the dominion over, and the use of, the lower animals for food. Thus reserved, it acquires a . . . power: that of sacrificial atonement" *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, W. Smith, ed. (N.Y.: Pillar Books, 1976), p. 88.

25. " . . . some parts of the suet, viz., about the stomach, the entrails, the kidneys, and the tail of the sheep . . . were forbidden to be eaten in the case of animals offered to Jehovah in sacrifice (Lev. 3:3, 9, 17; 7:3, 23)" (Smith, p. 189).

On this day, dear God, we afflict²⁶ ourselves until evening as You have commanded us. May my prayer not be locked out.²⁷

Lord of the universe [*Ribbono shel olom*], on this day may the full account [of my deeds] be brought before You, and may my upright intercessors [*melizim*] rebut those misdeeds that I committed during the year. Inscribe me in the Book of Life [*Sefer ha-Hayyim*] together with my husband and children.

On this day, may my husband's and children's [evil] decree [*g'zar din*] be torn up.

On this day, we cry out in anguish and great fear. Dear God, in ancient times the High Priest bore the sins that we committed, but since then we no longer have a High Priest to whom we can speak.²⁸

Dear God, remember that we are but flesh and blood, [we are] only what the Evil Inclination [*yezer ho-ro*], in misleading, has made of us. I pray for Your mercy. Of what avail will my [shed] blood [my death] be to You? Do not remove me from this world before my time, so that I may be able to keep all Your *mizvos* properly. Since we sorrow on this day, enable us to be happy the rest of the year. Do for me on this day as You did for us in Balaam's time: his intended curse became a blessing.

On this day, grant us Your divine help. Amen, Selah.

26. Cf. in connection with the Day of Atonement the following statement on fasting in Lev. 16:31 — "It is a Sabbath of solemn rest unto you, and you shall afflict your souls." Ignoring the nutritional needs of their bodies, Jews afflicted their souls with thoughts reminding them of their lowliness, finiteness and liability to err and, via *teshuva*, return to God's laws and ways.

27. In the mind of a traditional Jew, this metaphor easily established the connection with *Ne'ilah*, the concluding sunset service on the Day of Atonement. *Ne'ilah* means closing: the gates of heaven were closed at sunset, signifying the end of the day. This would be the last opportunity when prayers, winging heavenward, could reach God. Birnbaum, *HHPB*, p. 490 extends the metaphor poetically: "Before the closing of the gates of forgiveness which this day has opened for us"

28. The text is faulty. It could read: "... since then we no longer have a High Priest who can speak for us" This would be based on the Yom Kippur *Avodah* Service in which was described the elaborate service held in the Temple and conducted by the High Priest, as described in the tractate *Yoma* (see Danby, p. 162 ff.; also, Birnbaum, *HHPB*, p. 811 ff.): "... forgive ... sins which thy people, the House of Israel, have committed ... before thee" (esp. Danby, p. 169 and Birnbaum, p. 821).

Children With A Star

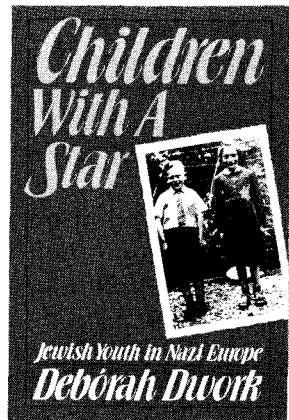
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How Reform Judaism Developed

Review-Essay by SEFTON D. TEMKIN

Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism. By MICHAEL A. MEYER. New York-Oxford, 1988, 494 pp.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF REFORM JUDAISM were laid in Germany in the 19th century; its most extensive development has taken place in the United States. The journey across the Atlantic involved a spiritual as well as a physical transformation, and sometimes one is uncertain whether its Central European forebears would recognize the American movement as their legitimate offspring. The author of the present volume is in an excellent position to make a judgment. German in background, he has spent his working life in Cincinnati as a professor of history at Hebrew Union College, and the connection between the two phases of the movement is one of the things that emerges from Dr. Meyer's book.

He has put both the interested layman and the professional scholar deeply in his debt for having provided a master work. If one hesitates to apply the word "definitive," it is only because the significance of that word has become devalued through inflated use. Obviously, fresh documents and divergent interpretations may emerge as the years go on, but, for the time being, we are provided with a volume which shows a thorough combing of the archives as well as considered judgment. It sets on one side all previous attempts in this field. Occasionally one wishes that the writing had been a little more warm-blooded, and that in the matter of illustrations Oxford University Press had risen to its usual high standards. However, the substance is to hand, and one can recommend the book not only to the student of the subject but as a paradigm of how a history of this kind should be presented.

One important limitation must be noted. Dr. Meyer is concerned with the pronouncements of the theologians rather than with the response of the people. (Occasionally the response of the laity peeps through, as with the opposition of the Germans to a code of observance). The period of Reform Judaism's development is one of the slackening of Judaism's hold, and, presumably, a message agreeable to that drift is what the laity heard.

The seeds of Reform Judaism can be found in the doctrines of the Enlightenment which, under the influence of Moses Mendelssohn

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(1729-1786), permeated select circles of Jewry in Central Europe. Politically, Jews might be cut off from the world around them, but, intellectually, there was no need for them to be self enclosed, for there was, according to the Enlightenment, a neutral secular culture in which they could participate without leaving the Jewish fold. Three years after Mendelssohn's death, the French Revolution added a practical program to remove the political barriers: "All men are born and remain free and equal in rights . . .," proclaimed the National Assembly within weeks of the storming of the Bastille; and in 1791 it completed the legal emancipation of the Jews of France.

Napoleon's armies carried the principles of the French Revolution throughout Europe, but his defeat (1815) raised a question mark against those principles, including the emancipation of the Jews. The Enlightenment, based on reason, had posited a universal humanity, but this had proved a cloak for French aggression. Now, German thinkers stressed the importance of Romantic feeling, in which the historic sentiment of the nation became the dominant force, and they questioned the right of a group which did not share the religion of the nation to share its life. The Jews, having experienced political emancipation, now found its continuance circumvented and thwarted while they argued their German character.

If anything seemed to the reformers to exhibit the dankness of the ghetto clinging to the Jews as they sought to climb the ladder of German economic and intellectual life, it was the public ritual of the synagogue, and it was in this area that the first steps to religious reform were directed. The Prussian government suppressed reform services in Berlin, but in the Free City of Hamburg a reformed temple was successfully established in 1819. Its radical departures from the established order called forth rabbinical anathemas from many parts of Europe, and these set off debate as to the authority to make changes. The accompanying polemics were one of the factors stimulating a movement for the scientific investigation of the Jewish past (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*): Jewish practice was not, as traditionally assumed, an undifferentiated mass, but the result of changes made by many generations — a process which it was legitimate to continue.

The current of opinion which regarded change as legitimate was strengthened by the emergence of rabbis whose training encompassed studies at a German university as well as knowledge of talmudic texts. The controversies were fought out within congregations, since congregations were not voluntary associations which individuals might join or leave at will, but expressions of state authority, adherence to which was an attribute of residence.

The theological and liturgical controversies which Dr. Meyer describes were played out within this organizational structure. Even where secession from the main community became legally possible, it appears to have been distasteful to the disciplined German Jew: the Reform con-

gregations in Hamburg and Berlin were isolated phenomena, and the separatist Orthodox institutions demanded by Samson Raphael Hirsch commanded relatively little following.

Equally strange to American eyes is the acceptance of government intervention in synagogue affairs. The convergence of these two streams — communal authority and government intervention — is well exhibited in the extended controversy which enveloped the Jewish community of Breslau in 1838. Its spiritual leader was Solomon Titkin, a traditional talmudist, and the liberal element desired to complement his services by adding a second rabbi in the person of Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), who became known as the leading ideologue of Reform. A bitter dispute ensued, leading to the intervention of the Prussian government, and the outcome was the eventual installation of Geiger as rabbi, alongside of Titkin.

Three rabbinical conferences (1844-6) endeavoured to grapple with the problems facing rabbis favourable to reform, e.g., Sabbath observance, use of the vernacular in prayer, and messianic redemption. One senses that they made no great impact on the development of the Jewish community. Specific issues were debated at length, but there was no attempt to formulate a Reform credo. The most important result appears to have been the withdrawal from the Reform camp of Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875) on the issue of the necessity of Hebrew in the service. Frankel sought to combine free enquiry with a more favourable attitude to tradition than characterized Geiger; this approach took the name "Positive Historical Judaism," and intellectually, though not sociologically, was the progenitor of American Conservative Judaism.

It was Frankel who, to Geiger's chagrin, was chosen director of the rabbinical seminary which opened in Breslau in 1854, and this corresponded to the cooling of the ardour for Reform. A trend in German Judaism emerged which betrayed the strong influence of the Protestant church; a Judaism which could be reconciled with current philosophical trends was taught, its rituals resting squarely on the forms handed down from the past, but purged of doctrines considered incompatible with German citizenship, and performed with dignity.

This trend received the description "liberal." Such was the hold of Protestant assumptions concerning the sphere of religion that when, in 1912, the rabbis sought to breathe a little fire into German liberal Judaism by recommending a code of personal observance, the laity resisted: religion could not be allowed to invade their personal liberty.

By this time, a political view had come to characterize German liberal Judaism: it was firmly anti-Zionist.

Elsewhere in Europe the controversies concerning Reform echoed the debates started in Germany. The distinctions which were the result often reflected local issues only, e.g., the position of the *bimah*, use of the vernacular, the breadth of education of rabbis, organ music (weekdays

only, on Sabbaths if played by a gentile, etc.) This made it difficult to determine the parameters of Reform. A possible criterion might be to inquire whether this concept of Judaism derived from the outlook of Abraham Geiger, who maintained that Judaism contained the teachings of universal religion in their truest and original form. Its mass of inherited practices were not of the essence, but accretions which responded to historic events and could be dispensed with under the changed circumstances of the nineteenth century. What were mere accretions was the task of scientific research to ascertain, though, obviously, the life of the Jew under emancipation created a situation which deprived of their binding force many of the prescriptions which had been handed down from the past.

In practice, Geiger did not act out this principle. In America, however, the soil was ready to nurture Reform Judaism in a radical form. After 1815, a substantial immigration from Central Europe propelled the Jewish community from infancy to adolescence. There is no reason to assume that the arrivals came imbued with the desire to practice their religion in a new form. The struggle for emancipation did not come into the picture, since the Constitution and the Bill of Rights had long before legislated for religious equality and separation of church and state. Later assertions, by Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), that Judaism had been "naturalized" since his arrival in 1846, suggest that Judaism was made light of as an exotic plant in the prevailing Protestant atmosphere.

From a closed society, in which the decrees of an authoritarian government, or traditions which seemed to have been handed down from time immemorial, set the course of action, the immigrants came to an open society in which European practices were not beyond question. In the words of Leo Baeck:

They came out of a world of traditional and community piety in which the old way of their religion blew into every door and window and enfolded everyone in every street. Now they were to live in a land of individual piety, in which everyone selected the manner of his religion, in which religiosity was not present from the beginning, waiting for him and then surrounding him, but in which each had to prepare a place of his own. It was a new world; they had traveled across the ocean . . .

The ink slinging which accompanied proposals to tackle the community's problems was considerable, and the absence of qualified rabbis and experienced lay leaders added to the difficulties. Through the unremitting advocacy of Isaac Meyer Wise, a Union of American Hebrew Congregations was established in 1873, and two years later Hebrew Union College opened its doors. These organizations did not assert either Orthodoxy or Reform; it was Wise's hope that, out of the experience of working together, a "consensus Judaism," suited to American conditions, would emerge.

A consensus did emerge, but it embraced the Reform point of view in advanced form. In November, 1885, Kaufman Kohler (1843-1926)

called a meeting of Reform rabbis in Pittsburgh. Kohler, then a rabbi in New York, had been strongly influenced by Geiger. After brief discussion, the Pittsburgh group adopted, with little modification, a statement of principles drawn up by Kohler.

The first principle, while acknowledging the qualities of other religions, declared that "Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea" and had "preserved and defended, amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race."

This was a time at which Darwin's evolutionary theories in the field of biology and Welhausen's reconstruction of Israelite religious history were undermining traditional belief in the Bible. Paragraph 2 of the Pittsburgh Platform declared that the "modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism." This, however, did not involve literal acceptance of the Biblical text — "the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age and at times clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives."

This qualified attitude to the sacred texts gave rise to a disdainful attitude to the system of Jewish observances. "Mosaic legislation" was "a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine;" "we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilizations." As if to drive the point home, paragraph 4. declares that

all such Mosaic and Rabbinic laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state . . . [T]heir observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Had pride in the achievements of nineteenth century overstepped all bounds? Even if we think that these Reform rabbis were merely naive in placing themselves on a pedestal, we might still envy them their optimism. However, the declaration itself gives a clue to the possible mainspring of this feeling: "We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men . . . " Did the group assembled in Pittsburgh feel that the freedom and prosperity of America signified that a messianic era was within grasp, which made the *mizvot* obsolete?

That they did not, suggests that the existing order of society was perfect. This was the age of the "social gospel," and, at the instance of Emil G. Hirsch (1851-1923), a paragraph (8) was added acknowledging the duty of the rabbis to "solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization

of society.” Here was the foundation of the concern of the American Reform movement for social action.

No long time elapsed before the rabbis were seeking to emancipate their movement from the Pittsburgh Platform, and substitute declarations have been adopted, particularly at Columbus in 1937. This should not make us withhold recognition of the Pittsburgh Platform’s impact. It created a framework within which American Reform Judaism has developed, and its influence is not lessened by the fact that, for generations, it has been taken for granted.

The affirmation of Judaism’s universalism and the emphasis on reason and modernity were what many, if not most, Jews wanted to hear (and many still want to hear) in a society in which the Enlightenment was influential; among other things, it placed them on a par with their liberal Protestant fellow citizens. The system of Jewish ritual observances belonged to another world. They were irksome and exotic, exemplifying the “orientalism” which Kaufman Kohler was exhorting American Jews to drop.

Dr. Meyer has little to say about the lay reaction to this Declaration, but its acceptability is reflected in the style of Judaism that is practiced in Reform temples. Its focus was the formal weekly act of worship, read by the rabbi to the congregation, mainly in English, embellished by organ and choral music (sometimes taken directly from the church), and often little more than an adjunct to the rabbi’s sermon. To accommodate this form of worship, the synagogue needed to be re-designed, with the pulpit as its central feature. In every respect, the model of the Protestant church was all-important. Hebrew Union College came under the presidency of Kaufman Kohler in 1903, and it was only natural that his outlook should influence the Reform rabbinate.

In the affairs of religion, nothing fails like success — an observation credited to William Ralph Inge — and Reform Judaism’s early exhaustion may have been due to the fact that it became the religion of those who were financially comfortable. Release from the discipline of traditional observances came only too easily; that the rabbis may have intended such release to open opportunities for individual piety did not enter the picture, and this was not something that circumstances in nineteenth century America encouraged.

Conditions outside of the Reform temples exposed the inadequacies of the program built on the Pittsburgh Platform. The Messianic universalism which enveloped Kohler’s thinking was belied by events. The expectation that progress would be the inevitable corollary of society’s development was rebuffed when the First World War showed that society could move backwards as well as forwards. There had already been a resurgence of anti-Semitism, and it propelled to the shores of America a community of East European Jews which greatly outnumbered the Ger-

man Jews already settled, and whose confrontation with the open society of America gave scope for a wide variety of religious and secular causes.

On a short-term basis there could be little expectation of a relationship between Reform Judaism and the East European newcomers (except on the basis of charity), but with a lengthened perspective it can be seen that there were reciprocal influences all of the time, argument being open as to the side from which the stronger influence proceeded. As they became established in America, many East European Jews found in the Reform temples the best focus for their own and their children's Judaism, and it was from the East European community that came most of the recruits to the Reform rabbinate.

The irrelevance of the formulation settled at Pittsburgh weighed more with the rabbis than with the laity. Zionism, an organized movement based on the idea that Jews were a nation, provided an obvious point of contention with the Reform view that Jews were a religious denomination. At the outset, Reform Judaism set its face against Jewish nationalism, but the romantic appeal of Zionism and its practical achievements in Palestine gradually undermined the opposition. This current became stronger in the 1930s, when Palestine's ability to offer a home to Jewish refugees became more significant.

Along with the appeal of Zionism came a warmer regard for the Hebrew language and the traditional observances of the Jewish home. The generation which rejected the identification of Judaism with a multitude of fixed observances, which were thought to stand in no apparent relationship to any religious principle, had passed away; the next generation sensed the need to recover something valuable that had been rejected.

To solve the problem, the Central Conference adopted a new set of principles in 1937. Its opening words describe Judaism as the "historical religious experience of the Jewish people," which indicates both a basis in ethnicity and the influence of the Reconstructionist movement, whose founder, Mordecai Kaplan, had used the term "advancing civilization of the Jewish People." A basis in ethnicity also appears in the generalization that "Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body."

The Declaration devotes little space to theological and philosophical questions: its principal business is to offer a program for Jewish living.

The Home has been and must continue to be a stronghold of Jewish life, hallowed by the spirit of love and reverence, by moral discipline and religious observance and worship . . . The perpetuation of Judaism as a living force depends upon education of each new generation in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

The turn-around from the earlier concerns need not be underlined. However, the question still arises as to its effect on the members of Reform synagogues. The chairman's deciding vote was needed to secure its adoption by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1937; each congregation individually had to initiate any change in program, and Re-

form congregations showed themselves as prone as any to develop a hard shell of orthodoxy. Halakhah has been much talked about, but faces a wall of individuation.

Early in the century the American Reform movement favoured the description "Prophetic Judaism." Dr. Meyer does not assume that his role as historian requires him to don the mantle of the prophet, but many readers will treat his record of the past as the jumping off point for attempts to delineate conjectures about the future. That Reform Judaism will continue to have a role in the Jewish communities of the English speaking world is hardly to be doubted. How far will that role reach? Will it do more than provide a religious top-dressing to a secular way of life?

Reform's principal achievement is in the realm of organization. Organizations, however, are demanding children, and the price that they have exacted is seen in the thinness of Reform Judaism at the levels of intellect and personal commitment. A religious institution may become as adept as any secular machine in the arts of public relations, but, in time, the public senses the absence of religious feeling in its activities. The well-favoured buildings on Fifth Avenue may invite deference, but a deeper feeling of awe is inspired by a relatively drab house in Crown Heights.

Both the achievements, and the shortcomings, of Reform appear in the response to the convulsion in Jewish history which has characterized the second half of the present century — a convulsion at least as devastating as that which precipitated the Reform movement in the first place. Institutions have been enlarged, but an intellectual response in any way commensurate with the transformation of the Jewish world is missing.

The establishment of the State of Israel has called for a reconsideration of the basis of Jewish life. Reform bodies can point to a goodly quota of statements in support of the State of Israel, brought forth by the politics of the hour. There have been protests against the exclusive rights accorded to Orthodoxy within the State of Israel. But deeper probing of the implications of Zionism for Jews the world over, in particular the meaning of "Jewish" when attached to a political entity that is recognized in international law, is hard to find. The presence of such problems is perhaps too much part of the climate in which Jews live to stand out and demand attention and analysis, particularly by those most directly affected.

There are problems less transcendent in quality which face the Reform rabbi and congregation, but as to which there is equally little disposition to wrestle with the implications of a world transformed. The Pittsburgh Platform's coldness to the traditional system of personal observances quickly showed that it was not the source of a positive religious influence. However, it has continued to legitimize dispensation from the discipline of halakhah. The prevailing atmosphere is rather more friendly to personal observance, and the Reform rabbis who try to make use of the halakhic system have to do so without being able to invoke its discipline. The result is usually a trivialization of Jewish practice. This takes

place in a Jewish world in which a militant Orthodoxy has become a principal force, and derives considerable strength from being the established church of the State which Reform is pledged to support.

Fifty years ago he would have been considered a disordered visionary who prophesied that Reform Judaism would develop in America in the way it is seen today. The factors operating today are equally hidden from sight. How far does the future of Reform Judaism depend on the prosperity of America? Economic decline might play havoc with the lush crop of Reform institutions, but, paradoxically, might it lead to a greater readiness to confront religious issues? It is possible that political Zionism might reach the goal for which it is striving; if not, will Reform Judaism have the strength to fill the emotional void?

The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel. By MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.

Reviewed by ALAN YUTER

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD's *The Body of Faith* is a unique presentation of Jewish thought. The author is a committed Orthodox Jew as well as a professor of philosophy at CUNY, and he examines the Jewish tradition with the tools of his trade, many of which are more sophisticated than those used by rabbis or denominational spokespeople. A phenomenologist who is well versed in Jewish, Christian, and secular philosophy, Wyschogrod states and defines his position, but he does not prove its truth claims. He is, nonetheless, able to explain the working of Jewish thought in terms that an outsider can understand. Ironically, Wyschogrod's use of technical secular vocabulary might place him in the relativist camp of liberal Jewish thought. He does not write like many other Orthodox Jewish thinkers in that he examines the world view and assumptions of liberal Judaism as a thoughtful, polite adversary. He translates the *ideology* of an apolitical rather than denominational Orthodoxy into the metaphor of the secular academic community, thereby giving his Jewish Orthodoxy the voice that he believes it deserves.

He argues that Orthodoxy's foil, Reform Judaism, is not just another interpretation of Torah, but an ideology of accommodation to a secularity that cannot accept the world view of the Jewish tradition. Reform Judaism's de-emphasis of peoplehood, Hebrew, and its non-legal ethics all undermine its claim

to authenticity and historical Jewish legitimacy. But Wyschogrod's presentations are always made with such an abiding decency and civility, that few adversaries will be personally offended.

For Wyschogrod, being a member of the Jewish people in the flesh has religious significance, whether or not the individual Jew recognizes it. Consequently, Wyschogrod affirms the moral worthiness of every Jew as a part of the Jewish people, because this is a consequence of membership in the "body of faith." For the Christian, a believer is part of what is called "the body of 'Christ,'" who, for the Christian, is understood to be "God incarnate." In the Jewish tradition, God resides in and among the Jewish people. Without an Israel in the flesh, in a historical context, there can be no covenant. Even a less than fully faithful Jew partakes in the covenant. Buber argued that there is no such thing as *Keneset Yisrael*, because there was no longer any definition of Jewish peoplehood shared by all Jews, but Wyschogrod shows that Buber did not consider *himself* a part of this Jewish "body of faith."

Unlike those who describe Judaism from the perspective of methodological distance, Wyschogrod does not apply the assumptions and biases of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or Jewish "science," to Jewish thought. He proclaims the message of the Jewish tradition based on what he takes to be Jewish assumptions, and not on the basis of what is taken to be the value-free analysis that is common among the advocates of "critical method." By using the Ashkenazic transliteration of Hebrew rather than the Israeli, Sephardic transliteration that is the convention among secular Jewish scholars, Wyschogrod establishes his ideological and methodological distance from this orientation. As a phenomenologist and philoso-

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pher, Wyschogrod makes assumptions. Because his loyalty to Torah is complete, he *never* stakes out positions that he cannot defend on the basis of his reading of tradition. He even endorses the restoration of the ancient sacrificial order because God so commanded in the Torah. He claims that this restoration must be authorized by a prophet, but this assumption is not at all clear from the Jewish tradition. The rabbis of the Mishnah recognized that the age of prophecy was over, yet they still assumed that the Temple would be rebuilt. According to rabbinic theology, the Temple, or *Bet ha-mikdash*, must be built by the Messiah, but there is no *legal requirement* mentioned in the Talmud that the Messiah must be certified by a prophet, as Wyschogrod claims. The reason why tradition teaches that the Messiah will not come on the eve of the Sabbath is that the *bet din*, or Jewish court, does not sit on *erev Shabbat*, and it is the *bet din* that certifies the Messiah. This doctrine is echoed in the daily prayers, which call for national freedom, the restoration of a Jewish judiciary, the elimination of heretics, the advent of a righteous leadership, the rebuilding of Jerusalem with *God's presence*, implying a restored Temple and sacrificial cult, and *only then* is there a prayer for the advent of the Messiah. And since the Jewish court sits in the Temple, in the *lishkat ha-gazit*, it is clear that the Messiah is authorized by the court, not the prophet. By restoring the Temple and the court, the Messianic individual *demonstrates* that he is, in fact, the Messiah.

Wyschogrod is a fiercely independent thinker who recognizes rabbinic authority, but he knows what rabbinic authority is, and what it is not. He reserves the right to evaluate so-called "*da'as Torah*," or the dogmas of contemporary rabbis who claim to be God's only

authorized spokesmen. He also calls attention to the fact that the rabbinic readings of Scripture are not the only way that Scripture may be read. Unlike Biblical critics, who question the authenticity of the Biblical text and, by implication, the right of Scriptural authority to make normative demands, Wyschogrod's independence is well within the historical Jewish tradition. Specifically, Wyschogrod observes that the Torah does not state why Cain killed his brother. He notes that the first tiller of the earth murdered his brother, whose blood cries out from the earth, and that humanity will ultimately return to the earth. The Biblical lesson, for Wyschogrod, is that humankind is *not* immortal, and is held to be morally accountable by a God who *is* immortal. Wyschogrod also mentions that the Bible does not explain why God chose Abraham. While he concedes that the rabbinic sages offered midrashic explanations, Wyschogrod reserves the right to render his own reading. After all, *peshat*, or the plain Scriptural sense, is not dependent upon any official body for determining its legitimacy. The self-same rabbis who applied the method of *midrash* were the rabbis who insisted that the *peshat*, the plain sense of Scripture, must never be ignored. Wyschogrod also asserts his right to read the Jewish tradition selectively and eclectically. For instance, he is impatient with Maimonides' aversion to anthropomorphism, and, instead, prefers the human imagery of the kabbalah. Indeed, without succumbing to fundamentalism, Wyschogrod accepts the Torah in its entirety, while emphasizing those elements of Torah that he can explain. Not only is Israel described as the "body of faith," but Wyschogrod's God is portrayed in human terms: "The God of the Bible is a person." This God

has a personality that undergoes development in the course of the story. He creates man with certain expectations, which are apparently disappointed, and then He is sorry that He created him. He is subject to the emotions of anger and jealousy.

Consequently, Wyschogrod the phenomenologist refers to God as *Hashem*, which refers to the *personal* Name of the Deity. While contemporary readers will be shocked with his anthropomorphism, it must be remembered that this metaphor does have precedence in the Zohar, the classical Jewish mystical work, and in the *Shiur Koma* literature (mystical literature seeking to describe God's physical dimensions, as it were), and it was defended by Maimonides' critic, R. Abraham B. David. When Wyschogrod suggests that humankind was created because God was lonely, he makes a claim that is difficult to defend on the basis of classical Jewish sources. His discussion of Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God is grounded on the assumption that "being" is a necessary part of the definition of God. Now, if being is, indeed, a perfection that is necessary for the definition of God, "being" becomes a god in its own right, because the Creator of the universe must be subsumed under being, making the ultimate "god" a definition of being.

Turning the argument on its head, Wyschogrod maintains that it is not the concept of being that implies the concept of God, but the concept of God that implies the concept of being. Although a phenomenologist by inclination and method, Wyschogrod rails against Heidegger's phenomenology of being because, in theory as well as in practice, it is amoral. By treating guilt ontologically rather than morally, Heidegger's Nazi affiliation can be understood, but never accepted.

For Wyschogrod, "Hashem is not the fathomable God of the philosophers," because, for him, God has a "psychology." Classical Jewish philosophy is hesitant to describe God in such graphic human terms, however metaphorically they were intended. And when the mystics spoke about God in graphic terms, the term *ke-ve-yakhol*, "as it were," was employed, so as not to mislead the reader. Ultimately, God can never be an object of human cognition.

Wyschogrod's use of human language when referring to God is also a metaphor. When discussing the problem of God's "being," he observes that if the universe includes everything that is, and if God existed before He created the universe, then the universe must

have existed before God created anything ... Judaism ... declares that being is created being. To identify God with being is therefore to identify him with one of his creatures, which is the very meaning of idolatry.

Wyschogrod rejects neo-Platonism, and probably the *kabbalistic* metaphor as well, for he denies that being *emanates* out of Hashem. The Creator created being, and is not hostage to being, which was a created category, and not co-existing with the Creator.

Wyschogrod's treatment of Jewish ethics and Jewish law follows from his anthropomorphic phenomenology, but it is not always consistent with the sources of Jewish tradition, at least according to the classical Maimonidean formulation. He correctly rejects *theology*, and prefers, instead, "Jewish thought," because the *logos* of God, the rational structure of God's being, cannot be framed in human discourse. This is because God is the author of being, and is not contingent upon being, and because humankind, being finite, lacks the

ability to apprehend the divine *logos*. On one hand, Wyschogrod recognizes that one cannot see God, but he claims that "what God says cannot become an object of analysis." In the context of historical Jewish thought, this assertion is wrong. Although Moses received an oracle, a revelation, or Torah at Sinai, this Torah was *received* with the understanding that it be handed over, transmitted, or surrendered to the judges of the *bet din*, or court, which is the norm-creating body authorized by the written Torah. Once transmitted and surrendered, God's will, insofar as it is *not* part of the halakhah, is unknowable *and* irrelevant. Now, for Wyschogrod, the Jew is bound to observe the will of God. But the will of God that obligates the Jew is defined necessarily and sufficiently in Torah. Wyschogrod rejects the claim that the Talmudic rabbis simply cannot make a wrong decision and thereby misread the will of God, and he suggests that "each individual must ask himself what God's will is for his particular situation." But the ancient rabbis never made the claim that Wyschogrod imputes to them. His own position is similar to Protestant Christianity, which places the locus of religious right in the conscience of the believer. But the integrity of Israel as a religious nation would be compromised if everyone would do what was right in his/her own eyes.

He claims that "there are no standards by which its [the rabbinic court] decisions can be called wrong." But the very mission of the Mishnah *Horayot* is to explain when, where and how the court can be wrong, as well as when the court is right by definition, because the oral Torah surrendered authority to this court.

Implicit in Wyschogrod's approach is that, in principle, everyone becomes his/her own law, which is equivalent to the absence

of law. He believes that the Jew is ultimately bound to fulfill the will of God, which is not identical to the law. There is a similarity between Wyschogrod and Ramban's view on the Biblical verses, "You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2) and "You shall do what is good and right" (Deut. 6:18). Ramban's view is premised on every Jew obeying the halakhah as formulated by the Sages. He adds, however, that, for the model Jew, more is required — namely, that one sanctify oneself with well-mannered restraint. Specifically, one should not insist on all that is coming to him or her under a strictly construed understanding of the law, and one should remove oneself from that which is ugly and impure.

On the other hand, Wyschogrod allows more individual autonomy when dealing with issues outside of ritual and tradition, i.e., in matters of moral choice and conscience, where he assumes the right to make his own, Jewishly informed, moral choices, independently of rabbinic authority and exegesis.

Unfortunately, Wyschogrod's approach is highly subjective and, inevitably, makes the halakhah the projection of personal whim rather than an expression of the will of God.

Wyschogrod makes an important contribution in his treatment of Jewish ethics. By emphasizing that "Judaism is a carnal election," Wyschogrod argues that Jewish ethics cannot be so spiritual that it ignores flesh and physical reality. He claims that "if anything, it is the Jewish people that is Judaism." This formulation, however, is too extreme, for it approaches the doctrine of the late Mordecai M. Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, which makes an idolatry out of Jewish ethnicity.

The Torah narrative distinguishes between *Am*, or people; *Yisrael*, Israel; *Kahal*, convened com-

munity; and *Eyдах*, or sacred flock. When the rabble assembled as *Am*, they possessed no sanctity and could not be designated as "Israel." However, when Israel, as God's chosen, sins, the betrayal is all the more egregious, which does support Wyschogrod's contention that *Israel* in the flesh does possess an irrevocable claim upon God.

Wyschogrod speaks of two kinds of Jewish ethics, one of which he rejects and the other he endorses. When Judaism is reduced to ethics, it is only "the Judaism of the assimilated." It represents that component of Judaism that is "most acceptable to the Gentile." This spiritualization of ethics, like Christianity and like Buber, is, for Wyschogrod, false. He correctly affirms that there can be no autonomous ethic. The function of the law is to make each individual subject recognize the other not only as an object, but as another subject whose person possesses an inviolate dignity, and it is God, the Creator of each subject, who makes this decree. The law teaches each individual to step out of one's ego and to see oneself as others see him or her. The "impersonal standpoint of the law" is precisely the social instrument for ethical teaching, and it is not the nemesis of law. Law makes the ethical possible. Wyschogrod rejects Kantian ethics as unhistorical and unrealistic: for Kant, ethical claims are universal; for Judaism, ethics are family based, and are not universal, because those closest to us make heavier claims upon us than do strangers. This, too, for Wyschogrod, is a consequence of the carnal election and the ethic of Judaism.

The most enduring contribution of Michael Wyschogrod's *The Body of Faith* is the audacity of the enterprise. He writes as an informed, thinking, committed Orthodox layman who has created his own thoughtful, if not controversial

synthesis. His work should be judged on the merits of its argument, and must be critiqued, as well as appreciated, by serious Jewish thinkers. Like R. Yehuda Halevi, Wyschogrod affirms what he takes to be the religious statement of Judaism as he reads Hebrew Scripture and rabbinic writings reflectively and critically, and from an insider's Orthodox perspective. This reviewer's methodological demurrals in no way impugn the considerable merit of the volume.

The Lamp of God: A Jewish Book of Light. By FREEMA GOTTLIEB. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1989. 498 pp.

Reviewed by MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD

IT IS QUITE clear that light plays a significant role in Judaism. The Sabbath and holy days, Freema Gottlieb points out, are ushered in by the lighting of candles which are also lit on Hanukkah, currently one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. Light is a key metaphor of Judaism for the presence of God in the world and, so, Gottlieb decided to compose a series of meditations on light in the Jewish tradition.

Her range is very wide, indeed. She does not proceed historically, nor does she stick to the theme of light slavishly.

This book, (she writes), partially consists of a series of quotations, mined from sources that range from Psalms and the Prophets to the authors of the Talmud and the Midrash, Kabbalists, Hasidic Rabbis, and twentieth century commentators. However, the treatment is not

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intended to be in historical sequence. . . . Historically, the links developed stage by stage, but for today's reader the poetic associations exist simultaneously.

The principle of simultaneity permeates the book. Passages from the fourth century are juxtaposed with those of the nineteenth, as are the most diverse literary genres. The organization is thematic. The eight chapters of the book are "Light of the Feminine," "Lights of Creation: Legends of Sun and Moon," "Light of Man," "Light of the Commandment," "Lights of Magic," "Light Out of Darkness," "Out of the Depths," and "Work of the Menorah."

Each of these chapters contains many quotations from various Jewish sources, some of which are beautiful and moving. But the reader searches for the point of view of the author, and that is not always easy to discern. As an exercise in clarification, I shall concentrate on the last chapter, "Work of the Menorah," with a view to discovering the author's message.

She starts by posing a question: If light was God's first creation, why did God require man's cooperation in kindling artificial lights in a man-made Menorah? The answer has something to do with Moses' previous difficulty with fire. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:26) tells us that Pharaoh dreamed that one day a child would take away his crown. Eager to determine whether the infant Moses was the child in question, he offered him a crown and a burning ember. If Moses chose the crown, then this would prove that the child did, indeed, have designs on the royal throne. As the child started to reach for the crown, an angel deflected his hand and made him pick up the burning ember. Hurt by the fire, the child put the ember in his mouth, thereby injuring his tongue and acquiring

the speech defect that was to stay with him for the rest of his life.

Gottlieb concludes that it was not only Pharaoh who was testing the child but, perhaps, God. There is, she writes (p. 411)

a dangerous killer quality in the Divine that somehow has to be deflected or placated. If not for the pain of circumcision [a reference to Exodus 4:24-26], if not for the pain of the Burning Coal against the tongue of the infant Moses, these innocent children really would have been struck down.

The divine light, she infers, is over-dazzling. While she never quite says so, she seems to be answering the question with which she started (why does God need human beings to kindle artificial lights) by implying that Moses' task was to capture the divine light in a form less dazzling and less threatening than that in which it was created by God. This is no easy task, and it is the reason why Moses finds making the Menorah more difficult than making any of the other vessels of the Temple.

Having raised the issue of the making of the Menorah, Gottlieb then devotes a section of the chapter to "Art, Imagination, and Bezalel, the Master Craftsman." Another midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:10) tells us that, although God showed Moses an image of the Menorah several times, Moses found it very difficult to reproduce. Much to Moses' amazement, Bezalel executed it perfectly, based on what Moses told him. Gottlieb uses this to distinguish between spirituality and esthetics. Moses was the intellectual who proceeded by means of concepts, while Bezalel was the artist who was guided by images. The "Previous" Lubavitcher Rebbe is quoted to the effect that "the stories of the Torah contain secrets and sublime mysteries much more than the laws." Presumably, the stories

correspond to images while the laws relate to concepts. Gottlieb, it seems, is deeply sympathetic to a Judaism of images in which art plays a crucial role.

The next section of the chapter is devoted to "The Ban Against Making Images." If art plays such a crucial role in Judaism, why is there a ban against the making of images? Drawing on a speech that Rav Kuk gave at the opening of the Bezalel Art Gallery in Jerusalem, Gottlieb traces the diversity of views in the sources with respect to the making of images. Some believe that "all visages are allowed save the face of man (*Rosh Hashanah* 24b). But even this can be circumvented, so that what is left, according to Rav Kuk (p. 421),

is only a small limitation, intended to remind the nation of Israel of a root principle, to abhor and not put up with those pictures specifically characteristic of idolatry, whether of the pagan world of past or present or of the Christian world.

Jewish law finally accepts almost any representation because it is inevitable, since "a complete ban upon such an activity would be as absurd as outlawing laughter" (p. 425).

But it is not only a matter of accepting the inevitable. God does not begrudge human creativity.

Gottlieb quotes a midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:6) which goes so far as to say that "whoever performs the commandments of the Torah and walks in its ways is regarded as if he made Him above. The Holy one, Blessed be He, says '(It is) as if he had made Me.'" The God whom man helps make is the God who shows His face to man, sometimes as one appearance, sometimes as another. Another midrash (*Pesikta de Rav Kahana* 12:24) tells us that sometimes God appears as a man of war, sometimes as an elderly teacher, and sometimes as a young man. But God insists: "Come to no false conclusion because you see me in many guises, for I am He who was with you at the Red Sea and I am He who is with you at Sinai: I am the Lord your God." If God appears in many guises, and if, by his deeds, man helps make God, then artistic representations of God can no longer be ruled out completely. Gottlieb does not specifically say so, but the implication is there.

I have tried to follow Gottlieb's argument in her last chapter. Her thinking is not systematic but associative. The reader is called on to interpret, and he has much to interpret because so much is quoted. This is not a work of systematic theology, but an attempt to think midrashically and kabbalistically. It is not unsuccessful.

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